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THE
BOND OF HONOUR

A Heart-History.

“Gefühl ist alles.”—FAUST

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. II.

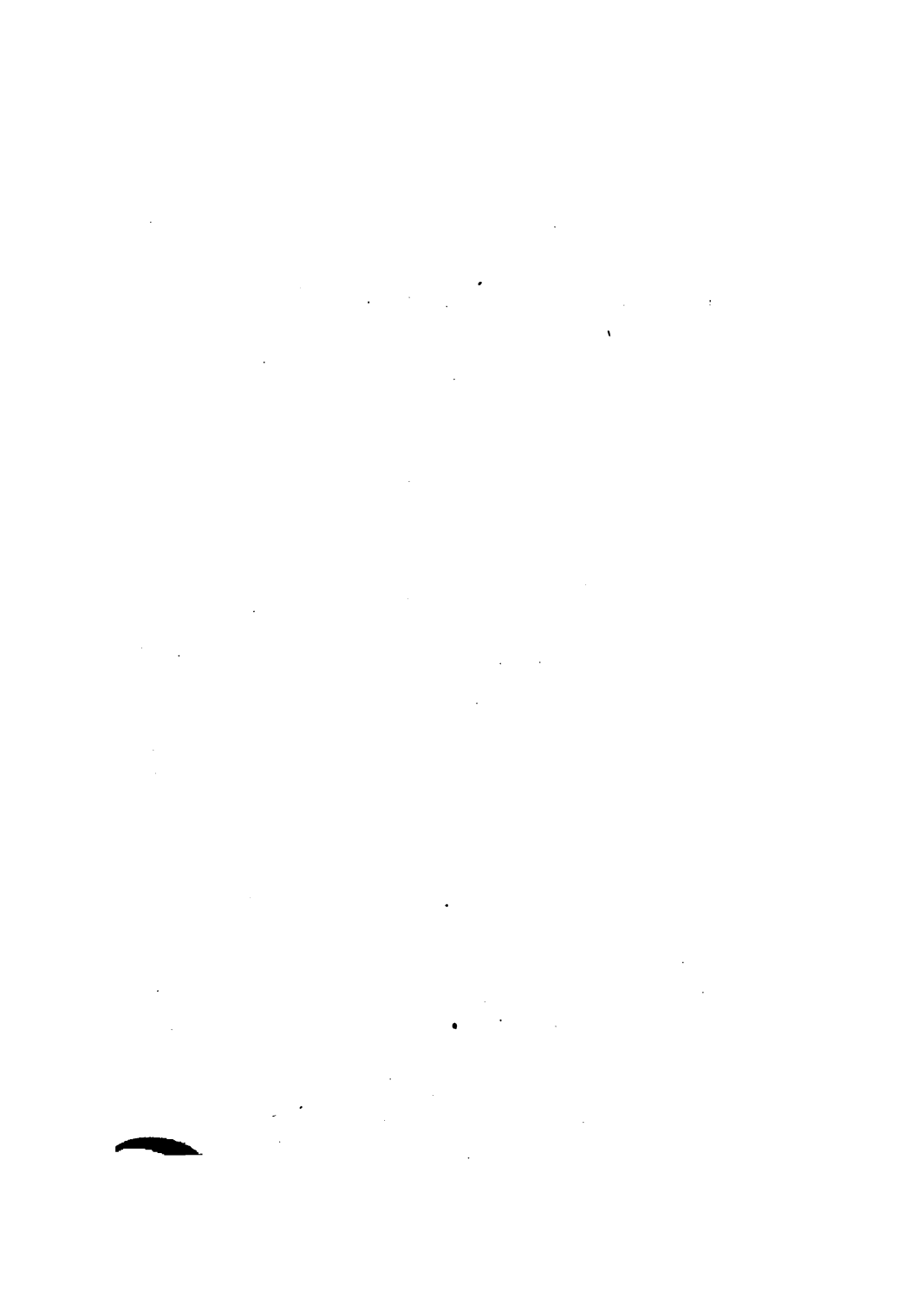


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THE BOND OF HONOUR.

CHAPTER I.

PARALYSIS AND PARSIMONY.

WHO can analyze the feelings of Louise as the train hurried her away from Bonn? They were a mixture of sweet and bitter, but the sweet largely, overwhelmingly, preponderated. The delicious sensation of reciprocated love almost overpowered the disappointment she felt at being forced to leave her home just at the moment when a life of such happiness seemed on the eve of commencing. She leaned back in the carriage, closed her eyes, and pictured to herself the lately enacted scene. How soft had been Arthur's voice, how tender and delicate his touch! What a world of sphere-music in the

one, what a magnetic love-force in the other. And now, too, the further past would bear to be repeated in thought. Each little word and action of Arthur, which she had treasured up dubiously in her mind, as men preserve strange seeds, not knowing what fruit they may bear, came before her now with the stamp and lineage of love unmistakable upon its brow. And so her whole past history renewed itself before her, as if inspired with a fresh life and irradiated with a brighter sunshine.

Such thoughts as these made even her present pilgrimage less irksome to her. She felt herself the mistress of such a wealth of happiness that she would fain have spared some to others. Even the cross and disagreeable old aunt, of whose illness she had before thought so little, came in for her share of the universal sympathy that love had kindled in the breast of Louise. She was really sorry she was ill. She would do her best to nurse her and soothe her dying hours. From what her father had told her, Louise was sure that the old lady could not live long. She was much older than Frau Bonngart, and this, combined with

PARALYSIS AND PARSIMONY.

the violence of her seizure, left apparently little or no hope of her recovery.

And, as all with Louise now pointed to one end, she could not forbear speculating when it was likely she would again be free. How she longed for the moment! But she would be patient. It could not be postponed very long. Meanwhile Arthur would doubtless write and express his feelings more fully than had been possible at that last short and unexpected interview. Then, and not till then, would she inform her parents of the good news. How she looked forward to this letter! How she hoped no difficulty would arise in its transmission, through Arthur's ignorance of her address! Perhaps he might not like to ask for it until everything was more formally settled between them. Then she bethought herself she had given him no answer. He might have expected one. He might be waiting for it. The idea was torture to her, but it was torture not wholly unmixed with pleasure. He had told her his love, but she had not confessed hers. Yet surely he could no more doubt it than she could doubt of his. Now all was clear and all was delightful. He would

write to her at once, and she would answer him. And then with a smile of joy she drew forth his lines from her bosom and set herself once more to read them.

She had a long journey before her. Her aunt lived at Würzburg, in Bavaria. She could not get beyond Frankfurt that night, but she would sleep there at the house of a cousin, and start again on her journey the first thing the next morning.

The programme was duly carried out. She slept at Frankfurt and reached Würzburg about the middle of the next day. She had never been there before, but she hired a *droschky* and bade the driver take her to the Kettengasse. This is a narrow street, with large houses on one side, which overlook the beautiful grounds of the *Residenz*. In one of these lived Frau Schönbrunn, her aunt.

The house—not, indeed, so large as some others in the street—was yet very capacious, and belonged to Frau Schönbrunn. It was one of her eccentricities—at least so her neighbours thought—to occupy it exclusively herself. She kept but one servant, and the

PARALYSIS AND PARSIMONY.

two made but a sorry figure in a house such a size.

The *droschky* stopped at the door. The bell was rung. The servant—cross-grain and middle-aged—came sulkily to answer and half-opened the door suspiciously.

“How is Frau Schönbrunn?” asked Louise with some eagerness.

“She ain’t no better, and she ain’t worse,” answered the servant, in a broad dialect, which Louise could hardly understand.

“She expects me, I believe?” continued Louise.

“Maybe. I don’t know.”

“Will you tell her I’m here—her niece from Bonn?”

The servant withdrew, leaving the door open. Louise stepped out of the carriage and made her way into the hall. The driver brought in her box, was paid, and dismissed.

In a few minutes the servant came down again, and in a still more sulky voice told Louise that she was to go up-stairs. The “*gnädige Frau*” would see her. Louise came

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plied. A wide flight of stairs led up to a capacious landing-place, where were evidently the best rooms in the house, but it was not here that the mistress was to be found. Louise had to toil to the very top of the stairs to reach the patient's bedroom. There, in a small, low attic it pleased her aunt to dwell.

Louise knocked at the door, but the servant pushed before her and entered.

"Come in," said a feeble, quavering voice.

Louise obeyed. A strange spectacle met her eyes. Upon a low sort of truckle bed lay, coiled up in rags and squalor, a slight, thin figure. The face was pinched and pale, and coarse tresses of grey hair were matted confusedly around it. One skeleton arm lay naked outside the coverlet. The bed itself, its trappings, the furniture of the room—all were miserable and poverty-stricken. Only one thing was bright in the whole range of vision, and that was the eye of the woman who lay in bed. This glittered snake-like with an unnatural brilliancy.

Louise did not recognize her aunt. It was many years since she had seen her, but

she knew at once this must be she, neither did the old woman keep her long in suspense.

"I'm glad you've come," she croaked out. "I was being robbed on all sides. Justine knows that I can't move, and she takes advantage of it."

Justine was the servant. She was in the room at the time, and scowled sulkily at her mistress when this was said.

"I'm glad you've come," repeated the old woman. "You'll be able to keep Justine in order, and see that she isn't extravagant. You'd never believe what she costs me in food alone."

"Don't listen to her," said the servant in a whisper, "we are both of us starving."

It did, indeed, seem so. More skinny and hungry-looking objects it would be impossible to imagine.

"I want you to sleep next me," continued Frau Schönbrunn; "there is a nice room ready for you. It isn't very large, but I daresay you'll find it large enough. And you won't mind my knocking for you two or three times in the night, when I want anything?"

Louise expressed acquiescence, but her heart sank at the prospect before her. Nothing was said about refreshment, though Louise had been travelling for some hours.

"Well, I will see you again by-and-by," said Frau Schönbrunn, "at present I am rather tired. Justine will show you your room, and will carry up your luggage. I daresay it isn't much."

Louise withdrew, followed by the servant. The latter opened the door of an adjacent room, and told Louise that this was destined for her. It, too, was an attic, with hardly any other furniture than a bed, a chair, and a washing-stand. Everything about the room bespoke neglect and discomfort.

"I should like to know how I'm to get up your box?" said the servant, abruptly.


"Is there no-one in the house who can help you?"

"There's no-one here, and the neighbours will never help us."

"Why is that?" inquired Louise.

"They don't like the mistress. She never gives them anything."

"Well, I suppose I must help you," said



Louise, who felt that this was not a time to stand upon her dignity.

They went down together, and, not without difficulty, succeeded in carrying the box up-stairs. Another question then presented itself to Louise. Even gratified love sometimes condescends to consider material wants

“When do you dine?” she asked.

Justine opened her eyes.

“We don’t never dine,” she said, with an emphasis which the double negative alone could adequately express.

“You never dine! How do you mean?”

“I mean that the mistress has a little milk now and then, or a bit of bread, or sometimes a potato. And I have the same.”

“You don’t mean to say that that is all you take?”

“Ay, but I do.”

“And does the doctor approve of that for my aunt?”

“She won’t listen to him—she won’t. Last time he was here she told him to go about his business, that she wasn’t going to pay him a lot of money for lecturing her. She starves herself, she do. The doctor says she wouldn’t

have been took so bad if she'd had proper food."

"But can't you persuade her to take more?"

"O, dear me, no! She suspects me dreadful. She says I'm ruining of her with my extravagance."

"Well," said Louise, "you must get me something to eat, as I'm hungry after my journey. I'll just unpack my things, and then I'll come downstairs into the sitting-room."

"Which room, Fräulein?"

"The sitting-room. I suppose there is some room where I can sit."

"There's nothing but the kitchen. The other rooms ain't got no furniture."

"No furniture! Why what has become of it?"

"The mistress has sold it since the Herr's death."

"Well, then, I suppose I must have my dinner here."

"I can't cook you a dinner, but I'll get something for you."

So saying, Justine left the room.

Left alone, Louise sate herself down upon

the solitary chair and bethought herself of her position. It was worse, far worse, than she had anticipated. She remembered her aunt of old as a cross, imperious, exacting woman, but she had not been prepared to find her a miser. Yet such, there could be no doubt, she was. It was well known that the old lady was, according to German ideas, rich, yet everything in her household betokened the most pinching poverty. Louise was much disheartened. She could have cried over the prospect. But the sweet memories of the past, and the consciousness of requited affection, gave her fresh courage and endurance.

She unpacked her things. She tried hard to make the cheerless room look a little less uncomfortable. And to some slight extent she succeeded. There is that in the very presence of a young and beautiful woman, which seems to throw a kind of charm over a room, a fairy glamour distils from her mere proximity, which spiritualizes and refines the hard material facts around her. At the end of half an hour, even this dull attic began to look more habitable and less bleak and dreary.

Then Louise bethought herself of the

promise made to her parents, that she would write to them at once. She took her writing materials and began. She was perhaps the less willing to delay, because she fondly hoped there was one at Bonn who was counting the moments until her letter should arrive, and who probably would not write himself until she should have been heard from. She described with some minuteness her journey, thinking all the while more of *him* than of her parents. She mentioned her cousin at Frankfurt, and repeated some messages with which she had been charged. Then she commenced a description of the state of her aunt, and of her aunt's establishment.

“Aunt Julie” (she wrote) “is very ill—but still not so ill as I expected to find her. From what I can hear and see, she is in no immediate danger, but she is very weak. What makes her more so is, that she denies herself proper food. She hardly ever takes meat, and has been going on in this way for a long time. She sleeps and lives in the most uncomfortable room in the house, all the other rooms except mine being unfurnished. You

may imagine that I am not very comfortable but I am very anxious to do my best for my aunt. At present she refuses to see a doctor as she says he only charges a great deal for doing nothing—but I hope to induce her to have medical advice again. The house is large but dreary and uncomfortable. I have had no time as yet to see anything of the town. Aunt Julie keeps one servant, who is at the present moment preparing something for my dinner. She tells me her mistress and she never dine!

“I hope to send you a more cheerful account when I write next. Meanwhile, will you let me have a little more money, as I see I cannot depend upon Aunt Julie for anything in that way? Please give my love to Theresa Theodore and Florence, and remember me very kindly to Mr. Vaughan. I will write again soon. With much love,

“Your very affectionate daughter,

“LOUISE.”

The letter was scarcely finished (it had to be written upon Louise's box, as there was no table in the room), when Justine entered with

a tray. It contained some raw ham, a *Brödchen* or roll, some salt and some water. The diet was certainly meagre, but Louise was glad of it. She only wondered that it should have been so long a-procuring.

"Thank you very much," she said.
"Where did you get this?"

"Well I've had a long way to go," answered Justine, wiping her moist forehead with the relics of an apron.

"Is there no shop near here?"

"Yes, there are shops," answered Justine mysteriously.

"Could you not have got it in one of them?"

"The fact is," said Justine, evidently making a great effort, "the people near here don't care to deal with us."

"Why not?"

"They say they have such a trouble to get their money."

"You seem to have a very odd set of people about you," said Louise, who did not wish to appear to countenance all that Justine said.

"I don't know about that," answered Ju

tine, whose manner was, to say the least, brusque.

"How long have you been with my aunt?" asked Louise, anxious to change the subject.

"Nigh upon thirty years—exactly thirty, come Michaelmas."

"Dear me! So long as that! And has she been ill long?"

"Yes, off and on, she've been ailing a good while, but it's only lately she've been took so bad as she is now."

"It's paralysis, is it not?"

"*I* calls it palsy. She've lost the use of the lower part of her body altogether."

"How shocking!"

"And she used to be so active. She was always about, never resting for a moment. How she used to look into everything!"

Just at this moment a knock was heard at the wall. Louise at once left her meal and went to her aunt.

"I want some water," said the latter, peevishly.

Louise gave her some, and was then about to retire. But her aunt stopped her. It was

evident that the request for water was only a blind for something else.

"What are you doing in the next room?" she asked.

"I am having something to eat."

"Ah! I thought so: my hearing seldom deceives me. Well, now, my dear," continued the old lady, who, in her eagerness to inculcate her views, grew, for the moment, affectionate—"Well, now, my dear, that is the very point I wish to speak to you about. The fact is, Justine is extravagant—disgracefully extravagant. If you entrust this matter to Justine I shall be ruined—quite ruined. Would you believe it, she bought two whole pigeons, the other day, merely for us two? I've no doubt she's brought you now more than you can eat. What's the use of wasting things in that way? It's sinful to tempt the appetite, and it does no one any good to eat too much. O, dear me! I'm so exhausted!"

The old lady lay for a few moments speechless from her exertion. Louise answered, cheerfully—

"Well, indeed, aunt, I think your injunctions must have had a good effect on Justine."

She has not brought me a bit too much—or two or three thin slices of ham and a *Briehen*."

"Two or three slices of ham!" groaned the old lady. "Oh, it's sinful, positively sinful. You only want ham as a relish, and surely a slice is enough for that. How can Justine live in that way?"

At this moment Justine herself entered the room. She had probably been listening at the half-open door.

"Justine, Justine," cried the old lady, with more vigour than seemed possible in one so prostrated, "how *can* you be so wasteful! Fräulein Bonngart is quite shocked at your extravagance!"

"Why don't Fräulein Bonngart say so then?" answered Justine, gruffly.

The old lady turned to Louise: "Do so," she asked, imploringly: "you know you think so—every one must think so—but Justine won't believe it unless she hears from you."

"Well, I haven't finished my dinner yet," answered Louise, evading the question. T

old lady took advantage at once of the admission.

“Take away the rest of Fräulein Bonngart’s dinner, Justine, and put it by carefully; it will do for to-morrow. I know you don’t want any more, my dear,” she added, coaxingly, to Louise.

Louise did want more, but she thought it better to say nothing. She sat down by her aunt, whilst Justine left the room and was soon heard descending the stairs and rattling a tray in the descent. By this time the old lady was again exhausted, and soon fell involuntarily asleep, when her niece took advantage of the opportunity to leave the room.

So passed the first day of Louise’s sojourn with her aunt. It was, in all conscience, uncomfortable enough; but Louise was sustained through it all by the precious conviction of Arthur’s love. It was every moment a life-elixir, which sent her blood coursing cheerily through her veins. It was as a golden sunshine which made the icy realities of life to glow with a thousand bright and joyous hues. And to-morrow she might hear from the beloved one!

CHAPTER II.

“MUSIC HATH CHARMS.”

IT was on the evening of the day that he had seen Louise set out for Würzburg that Arthur renewed his visits to Lessing. On one day had elapsed since last they had met, but this day had been so fruitful of experience to each that it seemed more like a month. Well, indeed, does Malebranche say that time is not to be measured by minutes, but by sensations.

Arthur found the little American in his sitting-room, and apparently in a very restless and impatient frame of mind.

“*Come stai?*” said Arthur, entering.

“Oh, hang the Italian! Here you are again: I’m glad to see you. I am sure something very mysterious hangs by your absence.”

What have you been doing? Where have you been? Why have you cut me?"

"‘Cut you,’ indeed! Your epidermis must be very thin. The cut’s only one day deep."

"Well, but I’ve wanted so much to see you."

"Why didn’t you come and look me up, then?"

"What’s the use of that when a man lives in a family like you? One can’t talk confidentially with a lot of Dutch girls chattering all round one."

It is to be noted that Lessing had a fancy for calling everything German Dutch. It was, perhaps, a comical and too literal translation of the word *Deutsch*, or else an exercise of his unbounded prerogative as an American. *Americanus sum et super grammaticam!*

"I daresay I shall go into lodgings ere very long," answered Arthur, whose mind was full of vague fancies as to what it might behove him to do in the future.

"I wish you would: it would be so much jollier. Then I should come to you sometimes, and it would not be always *my* chairs that would be worn out."

"Yet your present grievance seems to be that I do not wear them out quite enough. Besides, are they your own?"

"They are Mother Hoffmann's, and that is the same thing."

"Not unless bigamy is allowable."

"Oh, bother bigamy! It is about monogamy I want to talk."

"Not the Putzhändlerinn again, I hope?"

Lessing blushed at the remembrance of the *modiste*. In his present state of feeling it seemed to him incredible that he could ever have bestowed a thought upon so inferior a divinity.

"No, indeed," he answered; "but Arthur," he continued (for the friends called each other by their Christian names), "I have had such a glorious adventure. I couldn't sleep all last night for thinking of it, and I have not been able to do anything to-day. Such an adventure! I assure you it throws everything else quite into the shade. O, you should see her! She is as beautiful as—as—I really don't know what!"

"She! Her! Who? Whom?"

"Don't be impatient. I'll tell you all about

it. But you really should see her. Any description seems so commonplace. I never saw any one so beautiful in my life—not even in America, where all the girls are so pretty.”

“You mean England,” interrupted Arthur.

“Well, perhaps I do,” continued Lessing, with unwonted complaisance, and a momentary ebbing of patriotism. “The fact is, *she* is English, and I can believe anything of the English after seeing her.”

“*She!*” growled Arthur good-naturedly. “Hasn’t she a name?”

“Yes; but the name tells you nothing. Indeed it’s not a very pretty name, now I come to think of it?”

“Well, but what is it?”

“Her surname is Martin——”

“Suggestive of blacking,” said Arthur, thoughtlessly. Up to this point he had not fancied that the young American was in earnest, or he would not have run any risk of wounding his feelings. He now discovered his mistake. Lessing’s eyes flashed fire. A well take a whelp from a lioness as filch a je out of a loved-one’s name. Before Lessir could speak, Arthur interposed: “Forgiv

me, Ilty. I didn't know you were in earnest. Don't mind a foolish joke. I meant nothing by it."

Lessing's good-nature instantly prevailed.

"Don't mention it," he said. "Why, I agree with you so far as this, that it's a name which should be changed as soon as possible."

"With preference for that of—Lessing?"

"Would that it might be so! You've no idea—you can have no idea—how lovely she is. Such beautiful chestnut hair. Such bewitching hazel eyes. Such a sweet smile. Such an engaging manner. And, do you know?" added Lessing, sinking his voice into a confidential and mysterious whisper, "I do really think she's rather taken with me. I do indeed, and, as you know, I'm not much given to self-conceit."

Arthur smiled :

"There is such a thing," he said, "as being proud of one's humility, and that sort of pride at any rate you must allow you possess."

"Don't 'chaff'. It's really too serious a matter for that. Honestly, I think she likes me a little."

"Perhaps she is an old acquaintance," suggested Arthur.

"Not at all. I never saw her until yesterday."

"You don't mean to say it's my Miss Martin!" exclaimed Arthur, amazed at his own stupidity in not guessing the fact sooner.

"*Your* Miss Martin, indeed!" answered Lessing. "No, I am not aware that she is yours, and I venture to hope she never will be."

"I only mean that if she is the Miss Martin at school here, I suspect I have the honour of her acquaintance."

"Yes, she is at Miss Ross's."

"No doubt then it is the same, and, if so you have not exaggerated her charms—that is all I can say," returned Arthur. "And fancy she is as amiable as she is pretty."

Lessing looked pleased. It was a compliment to his good taste, as well as a solace to his love-stricken soul. Arthur continued:

"But do tell me how you made her acquaintance, and how it is you have accomplished so much in so short a time?"

"I do not know that I have actually ac

complished much," answered Lessing with unusual modesty, "but I think the foundation is laid for a good deal more."

"I suppose it was through your fair cousin—eh, Ilty?"

"Well, yes, she had something to do with it," said Lessing rather reluctantly. "But I laid the train entirely by myself," he continued, bethinking himself of his memorable conversation with the organ-man, which he still fondly thought had first secured for him Miss Martin's favourable notice. "However, I will tell you all about it."

With that, Lessing began his tale at the beginning, and carried it triumphantly to its end at Miss Ross's door-step, where cruel Fate for the moment had left it. It need scarcely be added, that the bare facts of his story were richly embellished with profound and original reflections on human nature in general, and with glowing panegyrics on Miss Martin in particular. Neither did the little American's account of his street rencontre suffer any diminution in the telling. He could not help being brave, but then he could not help also being a little bombastic. Arthu

wondered in which he would have shone to most advantage—a cannonade or a gasconade.

But that Arthur was in a measure, as Lessing said, *distract*, and therefore found it impossible to pay very careful attention to his friend's story, he must have been struck by the coincidence that Theodore had been brought home *hors-de-combat* on the very night on which Lessing had had his encounter. As it was, however, Arthur's mind was in too great a whirl to observe anything that was not absolutely forced upon it. Even the name of his fair steam-boat companion had at first failed to attract his attention. The fact was, a full half of him—*dimidium ejus*—was still roaming in that moon-lit meadow, where the young love had taken possession of his heart. He still stood in thought beside the slight, child-like form, wherein his whole earthly happiness was now centred. He still looked into those clear, expressive eyes, which caught the sheeny lustre of the moon, and transfigured it with the yet nobler radiance of thought and feeling.

"And now," said Lessing, when he had finished his narration, "tell me what to do

"Do?" replied Arthur, rousing himself. "Why, I suppose you ought to call on Miss Ross and inquire for the young ladies."

"But Miss Ross knows nothing about the evening's adventures, and besides, she's a horrid old cat. She had actually the impudence to call me a 'young gentleman!'"

"Commend me to human nature," exclaimed Arthur, laughing, "for perverseness! You don't mind being called 'young,' and you have no objection to be considered a 'gentleman.' Yet put the two words together, and you feel insulted."

"A false argument," cried Lessing. "Pickles are very well in their way; so is plum-pudding. But, put them together, and who would eat the mess?"

"Well, my argument may be faulty, but my advice is good. Pay Miss Ross a visit. You have done so before, I think?"

"Never, thank Heaven!"

"How then have you seen your cousin?"

"At the house of Mrs. Brownlow. She goes there very often."

"Then you must get Mrs. Brownlow to ask her and Miss Martin again."

"No difficulty in that. 'I can call spirits from the vasty deep;' the only question is, 'will they come?' or, rather, will that Prospero of a Miss Ross release her——"

"Caliban?" suggested Arthur. "You have got into as unlucky an illustration as my argument was illogical. Besides, Prospero will hardly do for a lady."

"O, for that matter, schoolmistresses are, if not masculine, at least of the epicene gender. They have all the vices of both sexes, and the virtues of neither. And you know I meant Ariel, not Caliban."

"Try the work of a schoolmistress, and see what sort of a character yours will be at the end of a year or two."

"I should be resolved into thin air long before that time."

"A most ethereal euthanasy, but one which, on sanitary principles, I should object to."

"Well, but now really, what shall I do? I am longing to do something. I must let off my superfluous excitement somehow."

"I vote seriously that Miss Ross be the victim. At the worst she cannot eat y'

and at the best she may be pleased by the attention."

"I'll do it, then, to-morrow. But is there nothing one could do to-night? Couldn't one serenade Miss Martin? It's very much the custom in this country."

"Certainly it can be done," said Arthur, "but I doubt if an English girl would care much for it. Besides, serenading is like sending Valentines. If you are known, it is a very tame performance; and if you are not known, another may rob you of the *kudos*."

"Ah! you are too logical, my dear fellow. You don't understand these matters. In such cases there is an instinct which tells everything."

"Then by all means get ready your Pan's pipes, and begone."

"That is just the difficulty. I don't play on anything but the cornopean, and not very much on that."

"I am afraid I cannot help you there. Cornopean or nothing. The thing lies in a nutshell. Can you play it well enough for the purpose, or not? I suspect your usual modesty is misleading you."

"No; really I don't play it very well," answered Lessing, quite innocently. "But I daresay she will take the will for the deed."

"Then set the will in motion. I will walk with you to the sacred spot, but you will forgive me if I do not identify myself with your performance."

"I should not forgive you if you *did*. The preserve is entirely my own."

"What! four-and-twenty young ladies for yourself alone! Atrocious!"

"No, but there is, after all, only one there—one queen of beauty—and the rest are, as it were, her attendants."

"Love is proverbially weak in the eyes, but I never knew before *how* weak. With you, however, it can only see one part in every twenty-four."

"*Allons!*" exclaimed Lessing, seizing his instrument and hurrying out of the room. Arthur followed. He was quite accustomed to his friend's impetuosity.

They walked on rapidly for some time until they reached the low wall which bounded Miss Ross's garden. It would have been easy to leap this, but there was no necessity, as the

stern portals themselves were open. Lessing accordingly entered, and ensconced himself behind a bush, whilst Arthur remained outside. No dulcet strains, however, fell upon the ear of the latter. On the contrary, he was almost immediately rejoined by the would-be Amphion.

"Why, what's the matter?" exclaimed Arthur.

"Which do you think is *her* room?" asked Lessing, in a plaintive voice.

"How should I know, my dear fellow? I thought 'instinct told you everything in these cases.'"

"Don't be unfeeling. Really it's very disagreeable not to know. I don't want to serenade that old she-crocodile of a mistress."

Arthur mused a moment good-naturedly.

"Between us," he said at length, "I think we ought to be able to get an approximate idea of the position of the 'queen of beauty.' As things are at present arranged, I take it she has not got all her royal prerogatives. If you know how the house is built, we can guess pretty well where she sleeps."

"How so? I do not understand."

"Where are the best rooms in the house—do you know?"

"Yes, my cousin told me they were all in front."

"Then you may be sure Miss Martin does not sleep there."

"She ought to. The best of them is not good enough for her."

"True; but fitness is not fact. As I say, she has not yet come into all her queenly privileges. Where are the worst rooms?"

"Well, when my cousin first came, she said she had a wretched little room which looked towards the Kreutzberg."

"Then, depend upon it, *that* is the room for new-comers. Miss Martin sleeps there. And that is at the back of the house."

Lessing muttered his indignation at the thought that his heart's sovereign should be so shabbily lodged. But he made his way round to the back notwithstanding.

Two or three minutes later a few straggling notes, evidently blown with the extremest difficulty and labour, reached Arthur's ears. At first, such was the interval between each, that he utterly failed to recognize any tune. At

length, however, it dawned upon him that he must be listening to that invariable *corpus vile* for the young cornopean-player to experiment-upon, "A cottage near a wood." Yes; there was no doubt. The tune gradually gained a little in firmness and coherency, though apparently at the cost of infinite exertion to the performer.

Arthur was much amused. The idea of intruding upon a sweetheart's slumbers with such a crude performance seemed to him not unlike a young lady's attempting to captivate a musical swain by diligently practising her scales in his hearing. However, he waited patiently until the end of the performance. In about ten minutes Lessing rejoined him.

"Well, how do you think I got on?"

"*A merveille*—for any one who has taken only three lessons."

"Who told you I had taken only three lessons? I have had many more than that."

"What success did you have?" asked Arthur, anxious to get off such dangerous ground. "Did you see any one?"

"I think she came to the window. I can-

not be sure. All girls look so much alike at that distance. But I saw something white."

"You don't mean to say the 'instinct' was again at fault?"

"No! I am sure it was her. It must have been her," cried Lessing, whose excitement for the nonce dethroned his grammar.

"Did she wave a pocket-handkerchief, or give you any other sign?"

"I can't swear I saw such a thing. But really I could not distinguish well from where I was."

Arthur had his own suspicions, but he thought it kinder to keep them to himself. The fact was, as he surmised. Miss Ross—the ever-vigilant—had gone to the window and made a desperate attempt to discover who the serenader might be. But the window glass had counteracted the force of her powerful spectacles, and she had, in consequence, failed to establish the question of identity to her satisfaction. That some audacious masculine intruder had made his way into the sacred precincts of the outer court of that Temple of the Muses, was evident. She resolved that for the future rigid steps must be

taken to exclude these "Proselytes of the Gate." Rapt in such congenial meditation, she went again to bed.

And through it all slept Miss Martin with the freshness and soundness of sixteen. The near presence of her admirer, and the dulcet notes of his instrument, alike failed to strike any instinctive chord in her heart. She was tired, and she slept. Lessing was in love, and he played. See life in its simplicity. See nature narrowed to a nutshell. Effect following cause swiftly and inevitably. Two and two for ever making four, whilst the spheres play out the triumph-march of Time!

CHAPTER III.

TEACHER AND TAUGHT.

IT were impossible to describe adequately the life of Arthur during the days that followed the sudden departure of Louise. It was such a new life—new not only in its inner feelings, but also in its outer facts. By one of those strange coincidences, which occur so frequently in the history of everyone that they are commonly passed by unnoticed, the very era of the great moral revolution which had convulsed his soul was also the era of a marked change in the routine of his everyday existence. The absence of Louise produced certain effects on which he had not at the moment calculated. While she was at home, much of his time had been necessarily spent in her society. She had played a large part in the microcosm of family life. It was

she who had generally led the conversation and planned the daily programme. All this had tended to keep Arthur and Florence more apart than would otherwise have been the case. With the exception of the breakfast hour they had hardly ever been alone together. But now all this was altered. They were thrown perpetually into each other's society, whether they wished it or not. And what tended to bring about this result more than aught else was the fact that the absence of Louise had deprived Florence of her usual instructress. How was this to be remedied? In the case of Arthur there was no difficulty. He knew by this time enough German to render it an easy matter for Theresa to continue his instruction. But with Florence it was different. She was still at the threshold of the language. It was simply impossible for her to understand grammatical explanations given in German, and it was equally impossible for Theresa to give them in any other language. This was a difficulty which had not occurred to anyone at the time Louise was so peremptorily summoned, nor, had it been thought of, would it

in any probability have caused the journey to be given up, as neither Herr Bonngart nor his wife imagined that their daughter would be absent for more than a few days. But meanwhile it appeared a pity that Florence's work should be interrupted, and yet there seemed no help for it.

In this dilemma Arthur became useful. It is true he did not proffer his help. Whilst coveting above all things the office of Florence's teacher, he had no reason to suppose it would be equally agreeable to her to receive his instruction. And he would not for worlds have proposed anything which could in the smallest degree have been distasteful to her. Besides, for his own sake he doubted the expediency of such an arrangement. It could not but increase the intensity of the feeling he already cherished for the fair American.

He preferred then to run the risk of appearing to be cross-grained and disobliging to that of foisting an unwelcome arrangement upon her he loved best in the world. But Florence herself, with her usual simplicity, cut the knot which no one else seemed able to untie. The second day after Louise's depar-

ture she said to Arthur at breakfast, with a winning smile :

“I have a great favour to ask you.”

“I am delighted to hear it. What is it ?”

“O, but it’s such a very great one that I hardly like to ask it.”*

“I am afraid it is impossible to grant it unless you do.”

“Will it be granted then ?”

“If it is in my power, most certainly.”

“You don’t know what it is or you would be more cautious. I am afraid it will give you a great deal of trouble.”

“The more the better. But anything done for you would be a pleasure.”

“I wonder how often, and to how many people you have made that speech ?”

Arthur wondered also. It did sound very familiar to his ears. But he was quite sure he had never meant it before as he meant it now.

“I am afraid I can’t ask you,” continued Florence. “I really haven’t courage enough.”

“Am I then so very formidable ?”

“No, it is not that exactly. If you were more of an ogre, I should not hesitate so much,

for then I should be sure that, if you did not like the proposition, you would decline it. But you are so good-natured that I am certain you will accept it, no matter how much it inconveniences you."

" 'Saul among the prophets !' So *you* have taken to complimenting !"

"There is nothing to prevent a compliment being the truth."

"And nothing to prevent your dressing a Greek statue in Parisian finery."

"You mean the things are incongruous."

"I fancy so. At any rate, 'Truth lies at the bottom of a well.' Let us leave 'well' alone."

"Is that a pun or a profundity ?"

"Why not both at once ? As Byron used to assert—I forget his exact words—'My finest sayings are a little obscure even to myself.' But if it was a pun, I apologize. I hate puns as cordially as ever did Dr. Johnson himself. But we are wandering from the subject. You have promised to ask me a favour—what is it ?"

"I do not remember *promising* to ask you. Will you, however, promise to decline doing it, if you don't like it ?"

"I cannot imagine the contingency, so I have no difficulty in promising that. Now perhaps you will tell me."

Florence had not much real diffidence in making the request. Always judging of everyone by herself (and in Arthur's case not judging wrongly), she fancied it would be to anyone more of a pleasure than a task to assist another. And she knew enough of Arthur to be perfectly certain that this would be his view. She imagined he would be ready to do as much for anyone else. She never presumed for an instant upon the intimacy between them as constituting a special claim upon his assistance. Had this occurred to her she would have felt more difficulty in preferring her petition. But it did not. So she said very naïvely :

"I want you to give me my German lesson while Louise is away. There, now it is out ! I hope you don't think me very troublesome."

Arthur's eyes sparkled. He had not expected this. In the present atmosphere of his mind, in which everything had assumed exaggerated proportions, this seemed to him a strong and gratifying proof of confidence. He

was too wise and too self-distrustful to attribute it to any tender feeling, but he could not help regarding it as a mark of strong esteem. He answered joyfully :

“And this is the favour you thought I might think it disagreeable to grant ! I was wrong to accuse you of complimenting. On the contrary you must really think me something of an ogre after all.”

“And won’t you really find it a bore ?”

“A bore ! A thousand times *au contraire*.”

“Don’t talk French or I shall think you insincere at once. I once trod on a Frenchman’s gouty toe. The poor man’s face expressed the extreme of agony. I was profuse in my apologies. ‘I am afraid I have hurt you very much,’ I said.

“‘*Au contraire, mademoiselle ; c’est un plaisir.*’ It was very polite, but not very sincere. I asked another Frenchman why in such cases they always said ‘*Au contraire.*’

“‘*La phrase est de rigueur, mademoiselle, mais elle ne veut dire rien.*’”

“*Voilà toute la langue française !*” exclaimed Arthur.

“*Plutôt le caractère français !*” answered

Florence. "Truth, earnestness, everything sacrificed to the *convenances*."

"At least this politeness makes the French very agreeable companions."

"And very *disagreeable* friends!"

"O, the word friend, in our sense, has no place in the French dictionary. *Ami* bears the same relation to *friend* that *aimer* does to our verb *to love*. The nation that has one and the same word to express loving and liking—the deepest attachment that can subsist between kindred souls and the cursory approval of a *côtelette à la Maintenon*—is not likely to understand the meaning of the German *Freundschaft* and the English friendship."

"What then makes the French the great nation they are?"

"They are great only in public," answered Arthur. "Their greatness is essentially hollow and superficial. Their chief idol is *la Gloire*, and the mainspring of all their actions vanity. Paris is the world—French the only language for civilized beings. And this sublime belief in their own supreme importance does really, in a way, render them capable of accomplishing much. It inflates them

with an artificial courage and *élan* that sometimes carry all before them."

"Well, their language is very pretty and graceful. And how much easier than this uncouth German, which is giving me so much trouble just now."

"You are right. For conversation, French is the prince of languages. It is essentially *la langue des diplomates*. Everything you are likely to want in the ordinary routine of talk, you can express more readily and gracefully in French than in any other language. Compliments, *bons-mots*, *badinage*,—all flow in it, as it were, naturally and almost without effort on the part of the speaker."

"You seem as enchanted with the language as you are discontented with the nation."

"I have not finished. For writing, on the contrary, French is a most imperfect language—except, indeed, for letters. For these, it seems, as it were, made by nature. But there are many thoughts which absolutely defy expression in French. And why? Because a Frenchman cannot think them. The language is like the people—admirably polished, but superficial. And so it is always. A

nation's speech is the outcome of a nation's character. You may judge of individuals by their dress. You may judge of peoples by their language. The sage does not dress himself like the curled darlings of fashion: and German metaphysic could not move a step in the scanty drapery of Parisian politeness. But forgive me for philosophizing in this way. It is very rude of me thus to play the autocrat of the breakfast-table."

"I assure you I have been very much interested," answered Florence, quite sincerely. Her mind was always eager for information, and by this time she had got to value Arthur's opinion. The latter resumed: "When shall we take our first lesson? I am longing to begin."

"Don't make me doubt your sincerity again. Remember the daughters of King Lear."

"Well, then, when shall I commence the discharge of my new duties? Is that tame and commonplace enough for you?"

"It is not yet quite right; for you have no duty in the matter. I will be very exact and say that I am ready to accept the favour

you propose doing me, whenever you like best."

"There is but one time-point—'now.'"

"And that already passed! What are we to do?"

"Moments pass, but 'now' is ever present. *Le roi est mort, vive le roi!*"

They left the dining-room, and made their way up-stairs to the little study. On their way they met Herr Bonngart.

"I am so sorry," he said, after the usual preliminary greeting—"I am so sorry, Miss Lovell, that you must go without your lesson to-day. But no doubt Louise will be back very soon."

"I shall be so glad to see her again. But pray don't hurry her back on my account. I have just found a new teacher."

"How do you mean?" asked Herr Bonngart, puzzled.

"Mr. Vaughan has very kindly consented to give me some lessons until Louise returns."

Herr Bonngart looked pleased. The arrangement took a load off his mind. But he hardly knew what to say. Florence relieved his embarrassment.

"We are just going to have our first lesson," she said. "Don't you envy us? I wish you would learn English,—it would be such fun."

"More to you than to me," replied Herr Bonngart, good-naturedly. "As it is, how you laugh at me when I try to read a little English aloud."

So saying, he took his hat and went out. His parting accusation was a true one. It was a favourite amusement on the part of Florence to persuade the worthy Herr to try his prentice tongue in the pronunciation of English, and the result was certainly not a little ludicrous. But Herr Bonngart would do anything for Florence, and seemed under these circumstances to relish his own mistakes to the full as much as she did.

Arthur and his new pupil continued their journey up-stairs. The appearance of the little study invited to that from which it derived its name. There was nothing luxurious in its appointments. Substantial chairs and a strong, massive table seemed to say: "We can bear any weight, corporeal or literary." There was not much in the way of a view

from the narrow window. The mind had no temptation to rove outside, whilst the body sat within. The ubiquitous sunlight streamed in a little, but it was shyly and obliquely. There was really no excuse if the student did not at once concentrate his thoughts upon his work.

Yet Florence and Arthur did not do so immediately. The latter, though he maintained an impassive exterior, was almost overwhelmed by the conflicting sensations that swept like a divine afflatus across the lyre of his soul. Every instant he trembled beneath the nearer presence of the god. His mahogany chair was to him as the Delphic tripod, and he would have been fain to relieve the pent-up emotion of his breast by some pythonic convulsion. He felt that the divine was for the moment cabined in the human: that infinity itself seethed and struggled within the narrow continent of his single breast. Yet a sense of nineteenth-century decorum restrained all outward expression of his emotion. The wolf of unsatisfied love was gnawing at his heart's vitals, and he drew over it the cloak of a more than Spar-

tan indifference. But, oh, how much this seeming indifference cost him !

He had drawn a chair to the table for Florence, and another for himself. But at the moment—sitting thus at her side, almost touching her—the force of his emotion was so great, that he felt he could not begin. He knew not what to say or do. At first he could only sit still, and suffer in silence. Luckily Florence came to the rescue.

“Do you know how Theodore is to-day?”

By a desperate but imperceptible effort Arthur recovered his speech.

“I believe he is all right,” he answered. “At any rate he has gone out.”

This was said in a voice in which no one but the acutest observer could have noticed the faintest trembling. Inured to victory, his will had added another leaf to its triumphant chaplet.

“He could not have been much hurt, then,” remarked Florence.

“Not beyond the power of sticking-plaister to mend. No doubt he has been diachylonized into shape.”

“What a tremendous word !”

"I am not responsible for it. It is the formidable name of the commonest plaister."

"Do you know how Theodore met with his accident?"

"I hear he was knocked down by some over-exuberant person."

"But why? He was not robbed—was he?"

"Not of his purse."

"Of what, then?"

"Let us hope of nothing. I was thinking of Shakespeare at the moment."

"And I know the quotation you were thinking of."

"Let us have it, then, though I warn you it has no real connection with our present discussion. It was simply *à propos de bottes*—suggested by the word 'purse.'"

"It seems to me you deserve to have it quoted against yourself for ever thinking of it in connection with poor Theodore. 'He who filches from me my good name'—you must mean something by it."

"Nothing, I assure you. I owe the absent Theodore an apology for letting his adventure suggest anything to me but pure and unmixed compassion."

"I am sure you don't like Theodore."

"And if that were true I should be quite certain you *did*."

"Why?"

"Because you would be sure to take the opposite view to myself."

"Certainly, if I thought you prejudiced, and they say that is the case with all Englishmen."

"And with no Americans?"

"With some few—those for instance who admire England," answered Florence, maliciously.

"It is a mere *erratum*," said Arthur. "For 'prejudiced' read 'impartial' and I agree with every word you have said. The dispute is rather nominal than real."

"And your *erratum* can only find a parallel in those at the beginning of 'Wolfe's Travels,' in which he retracts the hard names he has called his enemies in the body of the book. I daresay you remember."

"O yes. For 'idiot' read 'individual;' for 'jackass' read 'man;' for 'fool,' 'estimable person,' and so forth. But really I must exercise my power as a teacher. You have

been very disrespectful to my country, and I shall revenge myself by being extremely strict."

They set to work. Arthur had already discovered, in the occasional assistance he had from time to time given Florence, what an apt pupil she was. But he was hardly prepared to find her so quick at grasping minute distinctions and retaining them clearly in her mind as he now discovered her to be.

Who shall describe that lesson? Who shall picture the world of inner meaning that lay behind the actual teaching? Do what he would, Arthur could not keep his mind fixed entirely upon the work he was doing. Every moment some half-delicious, half-melancholy thought stormed the inmost recesses of his heart. Each grammatic rule became to him the type and symbol of some subtle feeling. A magnetic pulse throbbed wildly within his breast, and threatened every moment to stimulate him into mental fever. A fearful strife raged within him. Love and self-denial contended for the possession of his soul as the archangel and Satan for the body of Moses.

And withal he must maintain a calm exterior. He did so, and in fact it was easier than he had fancied it would be, in that the very intensity of his emotion had sucked like a whirlpool into its all-devouring vortex the waifs and strays of floating feeling.

He could not analyze his sensations. One thing, however, grew yet more certain every moment, and carried with it confirmation clear as Holy Writ. He was madly, desperately in love with Florence. Was he glad or was he sorry? It was hard to say. On the one hand there was the burning agony of suppressed feeling—feeling waxing in intensity every moment—needing stronger and stronger effort to keep it down, like a volcano-fire struggling upwards through a mountain. It appeared sometimes as if the lava-flood must and would force its perilous passage out. And the effort to restrain it seemed to eat into the core of Arthur's being. But, on the other hand, there was the delicious sensation that he loved. There was that soft dream of Lotos-island life, in which the magic spell of the great enchanter steepes the senses of his votaries. If it be true, thought Arthur, that

“’Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all,”

so is it equally true that it is better to love without return than not to be inspired with this divine passion. The *apotugchanein philounta* is, after all, more tolerable than the barren desert of a heart in which no flower of affection grows—no oasis of pure, unselfish, and absorbing fondness relieves the monotony of ordinary life.

Thus felt Arthur, whilst the slight form sat beside him, whilst the hair rippled in golden wavelets over his arm, whilst the deep, trustful eyes looked up into his with all a child’s eagerness and all a woman’s softness.

And how felt Florence? Arthur had judged her right. She liked him for his kindness. She admired him for his talent.

Was there nothing more than this? Perhaps, far, far off—thousands of miles away from the busy metropolis of her thronging thoughts—in a kind of remote, sequestered hamlet of the mind—there even now lurked something that should ere long develope into a life-commanding tyrant. But at present it rested “mute, inglorious”—rocked in the cradle of a

poverty-stricken possibility—and not powerful enough to force itself into notice.

But Arthur might take courage ; for infant feelings of this sort are, like Hercules, even in their cradles, strong to strangle serpents.

CHAPTER IV.

“UNA BELLA MENDICANTE.”

SOME days later Arthur was sitting in Lessing's room on pretence of Italian, which neither of them was in any hurry to begin. The young American had his head on the squab of the sofa, and his feet over the back of a chair—in an attitude which anyone but the freest of republicans would have considered not a little uncomfortable. But he seldom assumed such positions with any view of resting himself. On the present occasion he remained still hardly a moment. Every fresh thought seemed to find external expression in some movement and contortion of his body. Meanwhile he smoked a cigarette in a restless, discontented way. At length he exclaimed :

"Have a cigarette, King Arthur?"

"With pleasure, my faithless Lancelot."

Both puffed on for some time without speaking. Lessing was again the first to break the silence.

"I wish I knew what to do about Miss Martin. I really can't go on in this way. You've no idea how thin I'm getting."

"That's quite the correct state for a lover."

"My dear fellow, there are two kinds of leanness—that of discontent, and that of extreme enjoyment. I suffer from the former."

"And you want to go from leanness to leanness?"

"Precisely. But what is one to do, when the golden apple is guarded by such a she-dragon as Miss Ross?"

"Have you called on that good lady?"

"Not yet. I am positively afraid."

"I should like to witness the interview. Of course you'd take your 'six-shooter' with you?"

"To shoot Miss Ross? 'Ashes to ashes, why not lead to lead?' A good suggestion, but not complimentary to the old lady."

At this moment a knock was heard at the

door. "Come in," said Lessing, and at the same moment sprang to his feet. The door opened with a quick motion, and a young man wearing the cap and ribbon of some *Student-anchor*, entered the room. He bowed stiffly to Lessing, who returned the salute.

"I think I have the honour of speaking to Herr Lessing?" he said, in German.

"My name is Lessing," answered the American. "Will you not be seated?"

"Thank you. My business will not detain me long. I have the honour to wait on you at the request of my friend, Herr Theodore Bonngart."

"Theodore Bonngart!" exclaimed Lessing in astonishment; and he turned to Arthur, as if seeking an explanation from him. The latter guessed in a moment how matters stood, but he thought it better not to interrupt the emissary.

"What can I do for Herr Bonngart?" asked Lessing, still quite unable to read the riddle.

"He will be glad if you will do him the favour of naming some gentleman with whom he can arrange the necessary preliminaries."

"What preliminaries?"

"You must surely be aware that you grossly insulted him the other night."

"So!" exclaimed Lessing, who at last began to comprehend the state of affairs. "It was, then, Herr Bonngart I knocked down the other night?"

"No doubt of it. And he did not like it," added the German, naïvely.

"Well, I assure you I was not in the least aware who it was. I hardly know Herr Bonngart by sight. And he demands satisfaction!"

"He has commissioned me to seek that redress which every gentleman has a right to demand of another."

Lessing thought for a moment.

"If you will kindly leave me your address," he said, "a friend of mine shall call upon you in the course of the day."

The emissary laid his card upon the table:—

"AUGUST MEYER,

"CAND : MED :

"*Schuster-gasse, 15.*"

Then, making a profound bow, he retired.

"Well, Ilty," exclaimed Arthur, the instant the stranger had left the room, "what are you going to do?"

"Fight, to be sure."

"Can't it be arranged somehow? You mustn't risk your life in a nonsensical affair like this."

"Don't distress yourself on that score. This won't be like a military duel. We are both students. It will be a mere student-duel, with no risk to life, though a good deal to beauty."

Arthur felt considerably relieved.

"What weapons do you use?" he asked.

"It's always the same—a sort of straight sword."

"And are you good at using it?"

"Luckily I have been taking lessons for the last month, and I fancy I can use it almost perfectly."

This was so invariably Lessing's belief about everything he undertook—he lived, in fact, in such an atmosphere of fancy-created perfection—that Arthur was by no means equally certain of his proficiency. However, it was not a subject to discuss, so he asked—

“Who will be your second?”

“Well, I can’t ask you, because you are not a student.”

“*Gott sei Dank!* I would do anything in reason for you; but this is a little too childish. Who is it to be?”

“O, I know a capital fellow, who understands all about these matters. He belongs to the same *Chor* that I do. But I hope you will be present.”

“Certainly, though I would rather see any other performer than you.”

“I’ve no doubt I shall get on very well.”

“I did not mean that. I meant, it is not pleasant to see a friend running any risk.”

“Only to beauty.”

“Well, even to beauty. But when will the entertainment come off?”

“To-morrow afternoon, most likely, but I don’t know.”

There was a little further conversation on the subject, and then Arthur, having satisfied himself that there was no real danger, was content to return home, whilst Lessing made his way to the house of the student whom he intended to ask to act as his second.

Arthur found Florence alone in the drawing-room.

"Where are the rest?" he asked.

"What rest? Who is there? What companions have I, now that Louise is gone? Herr Bonngart is asleep in the dining-room. Frau Bonngart ditto, in her *Schlafzimmer*. Theresa muddling in the kitchen. *Voilà tout!*"

"And the queen alone is in the parlour, as the nursery jingle has it."

"But not 'counting out her money.' I can assure you. By the way, was it the queen or the king who did that? On the contrary, I am what you call 'very hard up.'"

"I am delighted to hear it."

"What do you mean? You are not usually so unfeeling."

"I mean that it will give me the privilege of lending to you."

"I am not so sure of that. It is not right that you should confer all the favours."

"In this case the favour would be mutual."

"How can you venture to say that before you know how much I want? Suppose I

borrowed all your fortune, and never returned it?"

"It would be at your service?"

"Well, I could believe almost everything of your good nature, but I could not quite believe *that*."

Little did Florence guess the sincerity that lay beneath the polite complaisance of Arthur. Not merely his fortune, but his life, was he ready—nay, eager—to lay at her feet. He resumed—

"I am afraid my 'fortune,' as you are kind enough to call it, would not go very far towards supplying a young lady's wants."

"Herr Bonngart tells me you are very rich," answered Florence, quite simply, "and I suppose he would not say so unless he knew."

"That depends upon your idea of wealth. If you like, we will compare notes. My whole income is four hundred pounds—that is, two thousand dollars—a year."

"Then I don't call you rich at all. How you can manage, is a mystery to me. Why, I get a thousand dollars a-year merely for

my dress and pocket-money, and papa pays all my other bills."

"Ah, you are a favourite of fortune. And yet, at the moment, I seem to be the richer."

"Yes, I haven't a cent, and I shan't get any more till next month. And I want some money particularly meanwhile."

"You have only to say how much."

"That is so provoking. I am richer than you, and therefore you have no right to assume this tone of superiority," said Florence, laughing.

"*Vous êtes un peu difficile, mademoiselle.*"

"Well, it's enough to make anyone *difficile* when every favour is granted so readily. You ought to hem and haw and say that 'there are difficulties in the way,' and that 'the request is wholly without precedent,' and so forth."

"I never held office under Government."

"And I should think never would. Why, you'd want two or three new worlds to provide for all the applicants to whom you had been unable to say 'No!'"

"Do you wish me to inaugurate a negative policy at once? You have only to say so."

"No, we won't begin just yet. You shall lend me the money first."

"You have not yet told me how much it is to be."

"Twenty dollars. You understand our money, I know, though I don't understand yours. It's about twenty-five thalers, I think. You are sure you don't mind lending it?"

Arthur smiled and took out his pocket-book.

"I have nothing but a twenty-five and a fifty thaler bill—which will you have?"

"The twenty-five, if you please."

"Are you sure that will be enough?"

"Quite. Many thanks. And now I dare say you wonder why I have asked you, instead of Herr Bonngart."

"No, not at all; the English and the Americans are in a sort of way cousins."

"I wish papa could hear you. He says that there is a kind of 'natural repulsion,' as he calls it, between the Americans and the English."

"But you don't think so—at least I hope not."

"Certainly not, and I feel much more at

home with you than I ever shall with the Germans. But still that was not the reason I asked you for the money. Guess why it was."

"Pique, crotchet, or mistake are said to explain most feminine actions."

"Without exception the rudest speech I ever heard you make! I've a great mind to return the money."

"That would not annul the fact."

"Worse and worse. Do you recant?"

"Well, yes, I would always rather turn than burn. But you know the value of such recantations. Witness Cranmer and Galileo."

"Ah, but the relapse into heresy has little power to injure, for it proceeds from a perjurer."

"A Daniel come to judgment!"

"A Shylock struggling for his bond! Don't you ever lend money without lacerating the borrower's feelings, as the Jew wanted to lacerate his debtor's flesh?"

Arthur laughed.

"I give in altogether," he said. "I retract everything, and now perhaps you will tell me why *I* was asked for the loan?"

"The fact is," said Florence, "I have just made a discovery. Next week is Louise's birthday ; she will be back I expect by that time, and I want to make her a little present, without any one of the family knowing anything about it."

"I guessed it was for some very good object. Do you know what day Louise returns?"

"O, very soon, I believe."

"Have you heard from her since she has been away?"

"No, I have not, but Frau Bonngart has read out some of her letters to me. She writes almost every day."

"I hope she is comfortable where she is."

"Not very, I am afraid. I fancy her aunt is rather peculiar."

There was a pause. Arthur could not help thinking that the return of Louise must put a stop to those halcyon hours during which he instructed Florence. Possibly the same thought occurred to her. At any rate she remained silent for a few moments. Suddenly she started up and said :

"Now I must practise my music, if you'll

excuse me. My master comes almost immediately."

"Then I shall leave the coast clear ; but I protest against music lessons in the afternoon."

"So do I. But what is to be done, when one has such a distinguished master as *M. de Léon* ? A man with such a reputation may do anything ; but remember," added Florence, as she saw Arthur in the act of leaving the room, "you have something else to do now you have lent me the money."

"What ?"

"Advise me how to spend it ?"

"As if you would take my advice ! However, it shall be given."

Later in the evening Arthur received the following billet, addressed, Americanwise, "Mr. Arthur Vaughan":

"DEAR ARTHUR,

"All is comfortably arranged. The affair takes place on Thursday at three o'clock, at a village about one mile (German) out, named Platzdorf. You must come, for the fun of the thing.

"I send this note, as I am never sure *now*

that you will join me in my evening stroll. I can't imagine what prevents you ! Come if you can, and don't breathe a word of my affair to anyone, including my noble antagonist.

" Ever yours,
" ILTY."

Arthur looked a little curiously at Theodore, who was sitting opposite. It was true, as Florence had said, that he did not like Theodore. There was something about the latter that clashed, not merely with his principles, but with his instincts. No doubt Herr Bonngart's son was handsome—very handsome—in fact he was a masculine copy of Louise. Dark hair, not worn very long, set off a complexion still tolerably bright in spite of the somewhat deep potations of the young student. Good features, including that rarest of attractions in the middle-class German, sound white teeth, would have led anyone to pronounce him at first sight a young man of very pleasing appearance, but when you looked closer and deeper, you saw traces of something sinister. Much of his mother's cunning lurked in the corners of his eyes—all his

father's conceit in the general expression of his face—and a sensuality peculiarly his own in the shape and fulness of his lips. Then, too, there was a general air of rakishness about him, on which indeed he prided himself not a little.

Arthur could not profess that he knew him intimately. They generally met at dinner—occasionally as now at supper, when Theodore's hard nocturnal studies would permit of his presence. Once or twice they had been for a walk together in the first days of their acquaintance, when Theodore had fancied the Englishman might be of use to him in paying for the beer, which he always consumed in large quantities *en route*. "I must have beer," he had said to Arthur. "All philosophy is dry," the other had answered in English, "but the Peripatetic philosophy is the driest of all."

Theodore had not understood, but the beer had been paid for, which was the chief point—the *Hauptsache*. Such beery walks were not, however, much to Arthur's taste. It was not that he was by any means one of those ethereal creatures that have a soul above all material weaknesses and wants. On the contrary, he

had learnt at Oxford to appreciate the merit of Brasen Nose "Strong," and Merton "Arch-deacon." But it was one thing to *drink* beer, another to *talk* beer; and it was this latter that Theodore did. Not only his body, but what he called his soul also, was soaked and saturated in malt and hops. His imagination was cooped in a beer-vat, and his ambition limited itself to bloodless triumphs on the field of conviviality. Suspended to his watch-chain he carried what was called a *Trinkometer*—a little watch-like appendage, constructed to record how many glasses a toper took. The number might well have baffled a bemused brain, without some such mechanical help.

But it was at the meetings of his *Chor*, or club, that Theodore principally distinguished himself. Thither, during the term, he went every night when he could venture to leave his family. It was there that he prosecuted those arduous studies, of which his father and mother spoke so fondly and so frequently. And it was on his return from one of these *Chor* meetings that he had had his *rencontre* with Lessing.

Theodore's *Chor*, like most other *Stu-*

denten-Chöre, was distinguished mainly for three things, which, in order of importance, stood thus: Drinking, Smoking, Duelling. For the first, especially, vast preparations were made. A room was hired at some *Gasthaus*, where, in privacy of company and perennialism of beer, they might carry on their work of slaughtering the golden hours of adolescence. Here, after their fashion, they enjoyed—or fancied they enjoyed—their selves. Loud-voiced songs, mingled with coarse language and rough, rude laughter, proclaimed to the neighbouring burghers that the flower of Germany was prosecuting its chief university studies. These were the “humaner letters,” in which Theodore and his companions indulged. As yet they had not accomplished the promised result of “softening their manners, and not suffering them to be savage.”

In smoking, too, the *jeunesse dorée* of Bonn, as represented by Theodore and his companions, was pre-eminent. If no soft, poetic dreams lapped them in the cloudland of romantic castle-building, they were, as a set-off, almost always in the mistiest recesses of the

realm of Nicotine. They lived in a constant atmosphere of smoke, the smell of which, stale and sickening, haunted their persons as remorselessly, even when they were not smoking, as the Erinnyes of Greek tragedy pursued their flying victims. Long pipes, short pipes, middle-sized pipes, all played their part in this solemn sacrifice. If, as a stranger, you had been admitted to the innermost presence—to the *sanctum sanctorum*—of these esoteric philosophers, you would hardly have been able to behold them, for the awful nebule that enveloped their shrine of glory. Cloud-compelling they sat, Zeus-like, beside their nectar, and cared no more for the inferior world outside than the gods of Epicurus recked of the dwellers upon earth.

And then, thirdly, these choice spirits were notorious duellists. It is true that, as Lessing had said, the element of danger was carefully eliminated from their combats, but then, as a compensation, the element of stupidity was introduced with unusual prodigality. Every new member of the *Chor* was bound to fight a duel as soon after entering as might be, and, if no opportunity presented itself, he

was forced to make one, or the *Chor* made one for him. This had already happened to Theodore. He had fought his first duel—one in which he had had no personal feeling whatever—and had been lucky enough to come off victorious; that is to say, he had himself escaped altogether unscathed, and had succeeded in inflicting two superficial wounds on his antagonist. This, under ordinary circumstances, would have been enough to satisfy the just requirements of the *Chor*, but the latter was very jealous of the honour of her members. It was impossible that the insult Theodore had received from Lessing could be passed over. The *Chor* had taken it up and insisted that satisfaction should be demanded. Thus it had come to pass that Theodore, who was himself a bit of a coward, and by no means prone to single combat, found himself compelled to “call out” the young American.

Perhaps it was a satisfaction to both that the contest, if not bloodless, was sure, at any rate, to be dangerless. Each, too, flattered himself that he would obtain an easy victory over his antagonist. On the one hand Theo-

dore was animated by the remembrance of his former triumph, and by the knowledge of his superior strength and stature. On the other, Lessing fancied that his mastery of the weapon to be used was complete and perfect. Thus they both awaited the event with tolerable equanimity.

CHAPTER V.

A STUDENT-DUEL.

IT was a calm, sunny afternoon when Arthur found himself on his way to Platzdorf. Lessing was not with him. That choice spirit had already started, in company with three fellow-students, one of whom went to act as his second, the other two in the more informal character of admirers and *claqueurs*. Still less was Theodore Arthur's chosen companion. He, too, had already set off, without vouchsafing to his family the faintest adumbration of a hint as to the business that summoned him from home. But Arthur had a companion to share with him his *droschky*, and to beguile the tediousness of the way. This was an American doctor named Thomson, who was studying in Bonn, and to whom Arthur had been introduced by Lessing.

Platzdorf was the place of combat. Every one knows where Platzdorf is. You go past the Protestant hospital, and take the Cologne road. Then you turn to the left, and, after driving about five English miles, you reach a very small, unromantic village, situated at the commencement of the huge, monotonous plain, that lies between Bonn and Cologne. This is Platzdorf—or, if not, why, at any rate, there is Platz there for a Dorf—so it might be there. *Se non vero, ben trovato.*

Arthur and his companion were seated in a carriage, that, by some wonderful piece of good luck, was drawn by a horse that could actually and positively trot. The German cab-horse has in general a peculiar motion of its own, more akin to walking than to trotting, but not very closely allied to either. The wretched animal is almost always leaning to one side or the other, and gives far more the impression that it is being propelled against its will by the lumbering machine behind it, than that it is itself the sole motive power.

But in this case Arthur and the doctor

were as lucky as those "whom favouring Jupiter loves." They had actually a horse—an animal which recalled (faintly and indistinctly, it is true, but still with a certain reality) the animals they had been respectively wont to call by that name in Rotten Row and Fifth Avenue. And, in consequence of this, their luck, they outstripped many pedestrians and not a few other vehicles going in the same direction as themselves.

At last their carriage stopped at the door of a wayside inn. It was not, after all, exactly in Platzdorf. It stood about half-a-mile beyond the village, by the road-side, quite by itself. And a dreary, desolate place it seemed. An air of poverty and helplessness pervaded the locality. It seemed as if the proprietor's purse had been too meagrely stocked to permit him even to paint up the customary indication of the trade he followed. No "*Zum schwarzen Löwe*," or "*Zur weissen Ente*" conjured up sweet visions of hospitality within. A low, barn-like house ran along the road-side, behind which there seemed to be a yard and out-buildings. In front of this house some dozen carriages were drawn up,

whilst their drivers, clustered together in a knot, amused themselves by discussing the probable result of the coming encounter. At the door of the hostelry itself, some twenty students were congregated, most of whom wore the cap and ribbon of some *Chor*. They eyed Arthur and Thomson rather suspiciously as the latter descended from their vehicle, and the former heard one gentleman ask, in beery accents, of another—

“*Wer Teufel sind Diese?*” (Who in the world are these ?)

“*Verdammte Engländer!*” (Confounded Englishmen !) answered the other, yet more beerily.

The compliment was evidently not intended for Arthur's hearing, so he took no notice of it, but made his way into the inn. More students were congregated inside, all drinking, and very many smoking and talking to boot. Here Arthur discovered a student with whom he had a slight acquaintance. The latter manifested some surprise at seeing the Englishman.

“I thought you English had a soul above such things,” he said, smiling.

“ ‘*On peut profiter des erreurs de ses voisins,*’ ” answered Arthur. “ ‘*Fas est et ab hoste doceri.*’ But, really, my principal reason for coming is, that it is a great friend of mine who is one of the combatants.”

“ Then you should have quoted Rochefoucauld, not Montaigne. ‘*Dans l’adversité de nos meilleurs amis, nous trouvons toujours quelque chose qui ne nous déplaît pas.*’ That seems better to account for your presence.”

Arthur laughed at the readiness of the young German.

“ Where are the belligerents ? ” he asked.

“ They are making ready. But which of them is your friend ? ”

“ The American.”

“ The American ! Is it possible that an Englishman and an American can call themselves ‘ friends ? ’ ”

“ A miracle, no doubt, but one that will even bear repetition. Let me introduce you to another case of harmony between cat and dog. This gentleman now with me is also an American, and we have not quarrelled on the way. We ought to be photographed at once, as natural curiosities ! ”

The German felt for a moment rather embarrassed. His natural politeness came, however, almost immediately to his aid, and he expressed the honour he felt in making the acquaintance of the American, and said how much he admired both his nation and the English. In which speech Dr. Thomson fancied there lurked not a little covert irony. At the moment there was a general move towards the yard, and Arthur and his two companions followed the crowd. In this way they arrived at a long, low building, on the other side of the yard, into which they entered. It was divided into two compartments by a lath and plaster partition, in which a large hole was cut. In the outer of these compartments sat a man at a table, who seemed to be dispensing the inevitable beer and tobacco, without which no German solemnity can take place. Leaving this antechamber, Arthur and his companions made their way into the inner room. This was of unusual size, and had a raised platform at one end, and benches and chairs all round. Some fifty spectators were already assembled there. They were mostly students, with bright caps and breast-ribbons, but

Arthur was surprised to see that there were several older people, whom he had not expected to find encouraging, by their presence, such a piece of wanton folly. For instance, there was the major of the hussar regiment, then quartered at Bonn, besides several by no means beardless subalterns. Then there were two or three middle-aged, or even elderly, people, who seemed to take a keen, youthful interest in all the preparations. Arthur noticed that these latter themselves bore traces of old wounds upon their faces, and he began to surmise that they were a kind of veterans, revisiting the scenes of their former achievements. He asked his German friend if this were the case.

"No doubt," answered the latter. "Such scars are reckoned a very great distinction even by the oldest and most respectable people."

"It seems to me that they interfere with beauty a great deal," said Arthur, comforting himself, however, at the same time with the reflection that most of these scarred veterans could never have had much beauty to lose.

"That is true. But what is beauty in

comparison of glory ?" answered the student, with almost a Frenchman's enthusiasm.

" And what is glory in comparison of common-sense ?" thought Arthur, but wisely said nothing.

At this moment, by another door, Lessing entered the arena. He was attended by his second, and several other friends, with whom he was laughing and chatting. Arthur thought he looked a shade paler than was his wont, but this was hardly noticeable by any one but a very intimate friend. The fact was that Lessing, although as bold as a lion, felt a little oppressed by the deliberateness of the whole transaction. He liked to go to work with his blood up, and it did not generally in his case take much to stir the vital fluid. But to be preparing for hours beforehand for a contest, went very much against the grain. Besides, there was in his mind a lurking suspicion that, after all, he might not be quite so good at fence as he had fancied, and, though he dreaded no danger, he was rather fearful of an injury to his personal appearance, and still more of appearing in any way ridiculous. He was like one of those curled

darlings of Roman chivalry, whose character Cæsar showed he knew so well when he ordered his soldiers to aim their blows at their faces.

Lessing detected Arthur almost immediately, and went up to him and Thomson.

"I hope I shall give you some sport," he said.

"We shall be contented with very little," answered Thomson.

"I may say the less the better," echoed Arthur.

"Well, you know it does not rest entirely with me. And, at any rate, it must last a quarter-of-an-hour."

"Why?"

"That is the fixed time. If one gives in before that time one loses the game. But I must go to get on my armour."

"Success!" cried Arthur and Thomson, simultaneously.

"No doubt of it," answered Lessing, confidently.

So saying, he made his way to the raised platform, by the window of which stood his "backers" waiting to endue him with his

fighting gear. Arthur and Thomson watched these preparations with a curious interest. First the young duellist had to strip off his coat, waistcoat, and shirt. Then the worthy host of the inn handed him a long, coarse under garment, the ends of which were suffered to hang down to his knees. Over this he put on a strange, uncouth sack of thick leather, which protected the whole body except the legs. This garment might, at one time, have been white, but was now, from long usage, a piece of curious motley, in which the dark colour of venous blood largely predominated. Round the victim's neck was now placed a sort of rolled collar, which was meant to protect the jugular and carotid arteries. His eyes were defended by a pair of iron spectacles. It might have been thought that this was sufficient, but it was not. In these combats the arm itself is used as the instrument for parrying blows, and it is necessary, therefore, that it should be very carefully protected. A huge sort of padded sleeve was accordingly drawn over Lessing's right arm, so heavy and stiff that, when it was on, he was fain to rest the arm upon the shoulder of a friend.

All was now ready. Lessing was led down to the arena, and a message was sent for his opponent, who apparently was waiting outside, for he made his appearance immediately. He was attired and equipped precisely like Lessing, except that perhaps his jerkin was a trifle more soiled. The two combatants were placed in the middle of the floor, fronting each other, at little more than a sword's length apart. In his right hand each held a long straight sword, squared at the end. By the left side of each was his second, kneeling on one knee, and also holding a drawn sword in a posture of defence, for the purpose of warding off any foul blows. An umpire stood a little way off, with a watch in his hand, and at a judicious professional distance might be seen the medical man who is always present on these occasions, and who, in this case, was the doctor of the *Chor* to which Theodore belonged. Grouped round the room, with pipes in their mouths, was the main body of spectators, all of whom betrayed an unmistakable interest in the scene. This interest extended even to the *droschky* drivers and a few intimates of the innkeeper, who might be

seen gazing with eager curiosity through the hole in the partition wall.

Arthur and Thomson agreed that it was a singular scene. The two combatants looked strange, almost unearthly, in their quaint costume, whilst the surroundings were indubitably picturesque. Theodore appeared deadly pale, and Arthur fancied he trembled not a little. Not so the young American, who felt every moment more comfortable, as the actual contest approached. And his indomitable self-reliance led him to entertain a good hope of the result when every one else in the room was forced to acknowledge that the odds were tremendously against him. Theodore was, by more than half a head, the taller of the two, and this superiority of stature gave him an immense advantage in the kind of fighting in which they were about to engage. It was very difficult for a short man to prevent a tall one from reaching over his guard by virtue of sheer length of limb, however skilful at fence the former might be.

Up to the last moment both combatants supported their right arms on the shoulders of friends. At length the word was given to

place themselves on guard. This they did by drawing yet closer to each other and raising the right arm completely above the head, so as to form a protection to it, and holding the sword with its point downwards as a defence for the left side of the face. The head was meanwhile bent forward, and the two combatants glared at each other for one brief, awful instant as well as they could through their iron spectacles. In another second the umpire cried—

“*Bindet die Klingen!*” (Cross swords!)

Theodore and Lessing did so, upon which their respective seconds answered—

“*Sind gebunden.*” (They are crossed.)

Another moment of breathless suspense and then the umpire exclaimed—

“*Los!*” (Disengage, *i. e.*, Begin.)

The combatants were now at liberty to strike, but at first both were very wary and cautious. Neither knew what the other was worth, nor liked to be the first to lay himself open. But the young American's impatience soon got the better of his prudence. He aimed a cunning blow under his opponent's guard, which nearly achieved its object, but

not quite. In return Theodore levelled a blow at Lessing's head, which the latter was quick enough to parry. Thus it went on for a few minutes, without any injury on either side until the actors began to show signs of fatigue. The exertion of moving their ponderously-equipped arms was evidently distressing. Theodore, in particular, puffed and gasped like a grampus. At last, just as Lessing was in the act of dealing a blow which he fondly hoped would reach its quarry, Theodore suddenly cried, "*Halt !*" and Lessing found his sword caught on that of his opponent's second.

The two antagonists now rested for a moment, leaning their arms, as before, on the shoulders of friends, whilst their supporters and admirers poured counsel and commentary into their ears. Wine was also proffered, but was declined by both.

The respite was but a short one. The umpire's voice was heard almost immediately saying :

"*Auf Mensur !*" (Toe the line !)

Again the two duellists took their places, and the second round began. This ended as

bloodlessly as the first. The fact was that, with only the face and head to aim at, it was no easy matter to inflict a wound; but the spectators began to experience a feeling of disappointment. A duel without bloodshed was not at all to their mind.

"You needn't be so cautious," said Theodore's second to that worthy, during the next *entr'acte*. "You are nearly double the little fellow's height. You have only to go in and win."

Theodore, puffing and panting, expressed his willingness to follow this advice, and in the next round played a less cautious game. He made two or three desperate attempts to benefit from his length of arm by reaching over his opponent's guard; but the American had for once hardly overrated his own proficiency. His eye and hand were alike as quick as lightning. At last, however, Theodore's tactics prevailed, and Lessing, after dealing an ineffectual blow at his adversary, found himself unable to recover his guard in time to intercept a furious cut at his head, which Theodore levelled in return. A piece of hair floated to where Arthur stood; at the

same moment Lessing's second cried "*Halt!*" and the spectators saw with much inward satisfaction that a rill of dark blood was trickling down the American's temple.

The doctor came forward and examined the wound; it was on the side of the head, and luckily had done nothing to damage the beauty, on which Lessing prided himself so much. The sharp corner of Theodore's sword had made a gash about an inch long, which kept bleeding copiously. The doctor pressed the edges of the wound together. Meanwhile the seconds straightened the swords, which had become bent in the last round. This done, time was up, and the combatants again stood face to face.

His wound had made Lessing furious, without rendering him rash. It gave him fresh energy and *élan*, which seemed likely to carry all before them; he was more than ever determined to win. On the other hand, Theodore was more than ever convinced that his task was an easy one, and he grew every moment more careless. Nor was this all. His tendency to *embonpoint*, and his intemperate habits, caused him to feel the exertion of the

combat more and more every moment, and his stertorous breathing might have been heard fifty yards off. He was every second becoming more exhausted. What with carelessness and exhaustion combined, he soon laid himself open to his adversary. Watching his opportunity, the young American skilfully parried one of Theodore's furious blows at his head, and then, quick as thought, aimed one himself at the face of his opponent. For the first time it was crowned with triumphant success. His blade, sharp, clean, and trenchant, glided with unerring certainty to poor Theodore's face, and inflicted the neatest of incised wounds along the whole width of his left cheek. The blood spurted out profusely. Theodore's second cried "*Halt!*" but Theodore's beauty—at least to an English eye—was gone, probably for ever.

It is impossible to deny that Lessing felt a grim feeling of satisfaction at the result. He cared nothing for duelling, and bore no particular grudge against Theodore, but there is always that latent savagery in human nature which needs but a little to make it revel in scenes of bloodshed and ferocity; and so it

was also with the bulk of the spectators. The sight of blood a second time shed, made them feel enthusiastic. Many of them crowded round Lessing with expressions of admiration and delight. "Excellently put in!" "A splendid cut!" "A masterpiece!" Such were the exclamations he heard around him. Even Arthur and Thomson could not forbear congratulating him, though the whole scene was to them not a little disgusting.

Meanwhile poor Theodore was quite crest-fallen. Though he knew that his present wound would always be a most honourable distinction, he prided himself, like Lessing, on his personal beauty, and did not relish the idea that it had been so much defaced. He began, too, to lose hope and heart as he felt more and more his own exhaustion. Thus it came to pass that, when the umpire called "Time!" he went to face his foe with a very feeble, reluctant hand. Notwithstanding, this round passed off without fresh bloodshed. In the next Theodore was not so fortunate; he was almost unable to wield his weapon, and Lessing had no difficulty in inflicting another facial wound very near the first. Luckily for

Theodore, the weary quarter of an hour was rapidly drawing to a close. With the greatest possible difficulty he managed to fight on till then, receiving another severe wound on the scalp. At last, to his intense relief, the umpire pronounced the combat at an end. The two antagonists shook hands—Lessing cordially—Theodore it is to be feared with an *arrière pensée* of unforgetting hatred. The latter, streaming with blood, had his wounds dressed by the surgeon in another room, and thus disappeared from the scene.

Meanwhile Lessing's friends overwhelmed him with hearty congratulations. In his usual self-satisfied way the little American (who in that respect at least was a perfect *megalopsuchos*) took them all as a matter of course—"as only his due, or even a little less."

"There was no doubt about it from the beginning," he said. "Did I not tell you so, Arthur?"

"You did indeed, and I am delighted to find that your estimate of your own prowess was for once so correct."

"For once!"

"Forgive me. I meant, 'as usual.' But what a pity it is that you cannot knock down a drunken fellow in the street without having to go through this half-absurd and half-brutal scene afterwards!"

"I did not make the world," answered Lessing sententiously, and turned to disrobe.

"Therein spoke the very spirit of the *Laissez-faire* philosophy," said Thomson.

"Yes; the no-improvement-at-any-price system."

Lessing soon returned. His own wound still bled a little, but he refused to allow it to be bandaged. There was to be another duel almost immediately, but neither the Americans, nor Arthur, cared to wait for it. So they all returned to Bonn in Arthur's *droschy*, which had been waiting outside during the combat. As to Lessing's student-friends, they were too ardently devoted to the duello to be able to tear themselves away from the new encounter.

The last words Lessing whispered to Arthur, as they parted for the day, were:

"What do you think Miss Martin will say to this?"

“She ought to be very grateful to one who has shed his blood in her behalf,” answered Arthur.

Lessing looked wondrous pleased, and went off to dream-land, happy as a holiday-promised child.

CHAPTER VI.

SHADOWS OF THE FUTURE.

VERY restless and miserable was Louise. A full fortnight had elapsed since her arrival in Würzburg, and still the time of her return seemed as uncertain as ever. Her aunt remained in almost the same state as when she had first seen her, neither getting better nor worse. At the earnest request of Louise, a doctor had again been to see her—a ponderous, phlegmatic man, who combined the advantages of cheapness and ability. He never charged more than a gulden (one and eightpence) a visit.

“I am afraid my dear aunt is very ill,” Louise had said to him on the occasion of their first interview.

The ponderous doctor had a tolerably keen eye, which he bent at once on his interrogator.

The word "dear" seemed to his practised ear to have an unreal ring about it. He thought, at any rate, he should not be running any risk of causing too violent a mental shock if he stated his full opinion of the old lady's state.

"The gracious lady is right," he answered, with the elephantine politeness of South Germany. "Frau Schönbrunn is indeed very ill."

"It is not, I trust, a hopeless case, Herr Doctor?"

"Very nearly so," answered the doctor. "These severe paralytic attacks are almost beyond the reach of medical aid when the patient is so old as your aunt. There is only one medicine that has any specific effect in such cases, and that I am about to try. But I do not anticipate any very prosperous result."

"What is the medicine?" asked Louise.

"It is a preparation of *nux vomica*—a drug which has a specific effect upon the nervous system. But it requires to be administered with the greatest caution. It depends for its beneficial influence upon being taken in small regular doses, that it may work gradually and

steadily. If anything can restore tone to the organization, it is this—but I much fear your gracious aunt is beyond its reach. She ought too to live very well; may I ask if she does?"

Louise blushed. She knew that the doctor's ignorance was pretended, and that every one in Würzburg was only too well aware of the miserly habits of Frau Schönbrunn. She did her best at an answer :

"My aunt has, unfortunately, very little appetite," she said, "and I am afraid she does not study her own wants sufficiently."

The doctor was amused at the disguise which his patient's weakness was made to assume. There was a curious twinkle in his eye, which Louise, with her woman's sharpness, did not fail to observe, as he answered :

"I hope you will be able now to persuade her to take more care of herself—in point of fact to practise a little more selfishness in the matter of food. And allow me to press the same advice upon you. Nursing is wearing and laborious work, and you ought to live well to enable you to undergo it. May I ask if you have any friends here,

for, if not, I am afraid you must find it very dull?"

Poor Louise did indeed find it dull—worse than dull. She allowed as much to the worthy doctor.

"My daughter will be very pleased to come and sit with you sometimes," said the latter, "and, if you should think a hired nurse necessary, I can recommend you a particularly nice young woman."


"Thank you very much indeed. I shall be so glad to make your daughter's acquaintance. But with regard to the nurse, I think Justine and I can manage very well."

"Will you allow me to inquire," continued the doctor, "if you have a young American lady named Miss Lovell visiting you at Bonn?"

"Yes," answered Louise, with some surprise.

"I thought so. The fact is, she was at one time staying here for a few days with an acquaintance of mine, also an American, and so I came to know her."

"Really! Ah, I remember now, she was staying here with Mr. Borrodale."



"Yes, that is his name. You know him, then?"

"Very slightly. He dined with us once or took supper."

"I will tell him you are here. He will be delighted to renew his acquaintance with you, and will introduce you to the best society in the place. But, now I think of it," he added, "he is away at the moment."

"It does not much matter. I have no time or wish for society now."

"You might go out a little in a quiet way, and it would do you good. You will fall ill yourself if you shut yourself up so much, and give way to grief."

Louise had indeed given way to grief, but it was not to grief of the sort to which the good man referred. After a little more desultory conversation, the doctor rose and took his leave.

Left alone, Louise pondered long and deeply. She felt wretched and desolate. The dreary solitude of the large house, in which hardly a sound was heard—the utter want of comfort that pervaded it—the niggardly economy that formed its atmosphere—all weighed upon her mind and depressed

her spirits. Then, too, she was physically weary with all the work she had done in nursing her aunt, and the peevish, irritable, suspicious temper of the latter had at times driven her almost beyond endurance. The old lady's senses were still acute enough, and what she could not detect, she had a habit of instinctively divining. She seemed to know everything that went on even in the kitchen. It is true that there was not much to know, as, in spite of all the efforts of Louise and Justine, it was impossible to induce Frau Schönbrunn either to take adequate nourishment herself or to consent to its being prepared for others. There was no doubt that she had in a great measure brought on her own illness by the miserable scantiness of her food. Louise had no keen appetite, especially under these circumstances, but she would have been well-nigh starved had she not supplemented her aunt's hospitality by frequent purchases at a neighbouring *restaurant*. These Justine used to bring in for her, and was by no means averse to sharing. It need scarcely be added that, after Justine's account of the ill favour in which

Frau Schönbrunn was held by the neighbouring shopkeepers, Louise always paid ready money.

As to Justine herself, Louise found that she improved upon acquaintance. She remained always very rough, and at times almost rude, but she seemed to possess an honest and affectionate disposition at the bottom of all her failings. Louise was quite touched by her fidelity to her mistress. Though she did not at all scruple to contradict her to her face, and even sometimes to abuse her behind her back, she would never allow any one else to do so. And she was always ready to do or suffer anything for Frau Schönbrunn—cross, crabbed, stingy, and suspicious though the latter was. In fact, Justine was like one of those schoolmasters who, though themselves not at all superior to the weakness of chastising their pupils, are very indignant if any one else ventures to doubt that the latter are immaculate.

But it was not only the loneliness and gloominess of the house and the many *désagrémens* that haunted it, which weighed so heavily upon the cheerfulness of Louise.

There was a far greater and heavier load at her heart. She had not yet heard from Arthur. This silence seemed to her almost inexplicable. She had not doubted that after that precious, parting interview he would have taken the earliest opportunity of pouring out his heart before her, through the medium of a letter. She had expected that she would thus have received a formal offer. Not, indeed, to do her justice, that Louise cared much for that. Though, like most of her countrywomen, not superior to the dictates of prudence, it was of Arthur's love she principally thought. Naturally enough, marriage would follow, but about this she did not busy herself. It was the delicious consciousness of being loved by the being whom she herself loved and admired most on earth, that was her all in all. This consciousness she had had for the first time when she left Bonn, and the rays of that light-giving sun yet lingered about her soul. But a cloud seemed threatening to intercept them. Else why had Arthur not written? What manner of love was this, that could let its object remain a fortnight without a message or a token? She

could suggest no explanation but the darkest and the gloomiest. Arthur had certainly not been summoned suddenly away, for he was mentioned in the last letter she had received from her mother. He must be aware of her address, or could discover it without the slightest difficulty. Why, then, this ominous silence?

Thus thought Louise, as she sat melancholy by the window of her room, which looked out into the pleasant gardens of the *Residenz*. Outside all was bright and cheerful enough. A summer sun shone in a clear cloudless sky, and its bright rays filtered their way in lustrous drops through the stately trees that stood in a double row before her lattice. And the contrast between the external cheerfulness and her own internal gloom struck a yet more melancholy chord in the girl's bosom. The sun might shine o'erhead, but he was fast setting in her heart. Merry crowds might wander in the gardens, but the old joy sate stiff and still in the lonely chambers of her soul. Ringing laughter might float in upon the zephyr to her unwilling ear, but the smile of mystic meaning that had once lit

up the innermost recesses of her being was fast fading into nothingness and oblivion.

How long she thus sat and mused she knew not. She was aroused by a tap at the door. She bade the visitor enter. It was Justine, bearing letters in her hand. Louise caught at them eagerly, scanned them for an instant wistfully, and then sank back upon her chair with a sickening feeling at her heart. There was none from *him*.

"I'm afraid you bean't well," said Justine, roughly but compassionately.

"Indeed I am not," answered Louise. "But never mind, I shall soon be better. Will you just see if your mistress wants anything, and leave me to read my letters?"

"Hadn't I better fetch ye a little wine from the 'Crown?'" asked Justine with a motive, nine-tenths of which was humanity, and the other tenth self-interest.

"No, thank you," answered Louise, making a desperate effort to recover herself. "I am all right now."

She still looked deadly pale, and felt an indescribable sensation at her heart. But she

possessed great self-control, and succeeded in getting the servant to leave her.

Then she locked the door, and falling on her knees in utter weariness and helplessness and anguish, she poured out the passion of her soul in tears. It was well for her she did so. Her weeping did her good. The pent-up waters of disappointed feeling needed some such outlet.

After a time she grew more composed, and bethought herself of those other letters, whose infinite insignificance in comparison of the one she longed for, had made her for a time forget them altogether. One was from her mother. The other was in her sister's hand. She opened the latter first, she knew not why. She cast her eye over the first page. It was in English. Strange! From whom could it be? For one brief moment a ray of hope flashed across her mind, but it vanished in another. The handwriting was evidently that of a lady. She turned to the last page—the signature was “Florence Lovell.”

Louise herself hardly knew what made her regard the letter with such interest as she did. Florence was little or nothing to her.

An agreeable child, and a tolerably apt pupil—no more. Yet she read the letter with no slight curiosity. Perhaps it was that she thought it might contain some information respecting Arthur. Nor was she mistaken. It ran thus, in the quaint, impulsive style of the young American :—

“ MY DEAREST LOUISE,

“ You do not know how we have all missed you—I, perhaps, especially, because we were such companions. Aunt Letty asks me every day when you are coming back, and says the house is not the same without you. I do hope you are comfortable where you are, and that you are not overworking yourself in nursing your poor aunt. How is she now ? I am afraid she is no better, as you have been away so long.

“ We have had a great event since you have been away. Theodore has fought a duel, I don’t know with whom. Don’t be frightened ! He was not much hurt. Only two most honourable cuts across the face. I’m told he fought like a lion. You ought to be proud of him. We don’t have exactly the

same things in America, and not being used to duels, I don't much like them myself. But I know they are quite the fashion here. And I like men to be brave.

"As to my lessons, you need not be uneasy about them. I take one every day, with Mr. Vaughan. He is so kind and clever. I like him extremely. What a pity it is he is so poor. I am sure he would be such a great man if he were rich.

"Come back, dearest, as soon as ever you can. And if you can't come, please write at once. I am longing to see you again. Accept my very best love, and '*mit Gruss und Kuss.*'

"Believe me,

"Ever most affectionately yours,

"FLORENCE LOVELL.

"P.S.—You will, I know, forgive a short letter, as I have very little time for writing. We are just going to take our coffee in Kley's Garden, where we are promised a Tyrolese concert, with the '*Jodel*' and '*Musik in der Entfernung!*'"

What was it that made Louise bite her lip as she read this letter? Perhaps it was

the thought of Theodore's wounds. But no, it was the third paragraph that she read and re-read so often. A dim, confused idea seemed to be gradually dawning in her mind. Could it be true? It seemed incredible, and yet she was sorely in need of some explanation of Arthur's silence. Was it possible that this paragraph supplied it? Again Louise bit her lip, and knit her brow, and paced restlessly up and down the room. "She takes a lesson with him every day," she murmured to herself between her clenched teeth; "how artful—how audacious. 'She likes him extremely.' What an extraordinary thing for her to say, unless it means more than liking, and she is thus making me her *confidante*. And what, too, does this mean? 'What a pity it is he is so poor!' Can it mean that it is that alone which causes her to hang back at all—that he is not a rich enough *parti* for her? It is most strange—suspicious; but yet how can so great a change have taken place in so short a time? Would to God I knew how matters stood! They baffle me altogether."

In fact, Louise could arrive at no decision. She longed to write to some one for counsel

and advice, and information. But to whom? Her mother, she felt instinctively, was too coarse and business-like for such a delicate negotiation. Her sister hated her. She had no friend on whom she could sufficiently rely. She was forced, therefore, to trust to herself, and to wait for fuller light. Perhaps her mother's letter might throw a little upon the affair.

At the thought she tore it open. It was a long, diplomatic, but not unkind document. Much of it was evidently meant to be read to Frau Schönbrunn, in order to give her a good opinion of the affection and solicitude of her Bonn relatives. Then, again, there were paragraphs on merely business matters, which were rendered more impressive by the accompanying enclosure of a small—very small—sum of money. Then the letter continued thus :—

“ Theodore has been foolish enough to fight a duel, but seems to have come off with flying colours. I am afraid, however, he will always have two scars on his cheek. The Father says he hopes he will, as they are the

proudest distinctions a man can have. He regrets so much that he never had an opportunity of fighting a duel himself in early life, though he is quite sure he would never have been wounded, as he is too good a swordsman for that. However, you will have full particulars about all this on your return.

“You ask when this can take place. It must depend entirely upon your dear aunt’s state. It would offend her irreconcilably with us all, were you now to leave her. Your father is furious at the bare idea, and I must say I altogether agree with him. I do not wonder at your anxiety to return. In fact, I am myself for one reason rather anxious about it. Perhaps you will guess what this is. I can hardly commit it to paper, but I trust to your cleverness to divine it. I may as well say it has nothing whatever to do with the lessons. Those have been *only too well provided for*. Let us hope your aunt will soon get better, and you will be able to come back in time to set things straight.

“Burn this half-sheet. The other you can show to your dear aunt, if her eyes permit her to read. If not, do not fail to read it to

her. Write soon, and, with much love from all,

“ Believe me,
“ Your most affectionate mother,
“ SOPHIA BONNGART.”

This letter did indeed throw light with a vengeance. Louise almost fainted. She knew only too well the meaning that Frau Bonngart's hints were meant to convey. Though she had never spoken on the subject to her mother, yet she was well aware that the latter was cognizant of the state of her feelings toward Arthur. And now Frau Bonngart plainly hinted at some difficulty having arisen. What could it be? It seemed that only one explanation could be given. There was, at the least, a dangerous flirtation on foot between Florence Lovell and Arthur.

What was Louise to do? For her life she knew not. As yet she was not calm enough to deliberate. She could only feel. The bitter sense of slighted beauty and of overwhelming astonishment at the treachery, which she imagined had been played her, hurried her soul round and round in a dark

vortex of devouring passion. With a woman's quick intuition she saw, or fancied she saw, it all. The childlike American had supplanted her—her, the acknowledged beauty of Bonn. Advantage had been taken of her absence to work a nefarious mine under the fortress wherein she trusted. Her first feeling was that of hot, burning indignation. Then came a sense of profound humiliation: her cheek reddened with shame at the recollection of her unworthy treatment. To this succeeded the bitterest hatred against her supplanter. And, over and above all these, kept ringing in her soul's ear the question, "What shall I do?"

She sat down on a chair. She pressed her cold hands to her burning brow—for all the blood had deserted the extremities and rushed to her heart and head—and endeavoured to collect her thoughts. It was a hard, a herculean task. The very recesses of her nature had been stirred, and now one deep was calling passionately to another. There was a supernatural tension upon her. Every thought was at the highest pressure, and the poor heart and brain throbbed like sledge-hammers.

In the first moments of her agony she feared she should go mad—nay, she *feared* it not—she hoped it, longed for it. For what remained for her in sane, actual life? Nothing! The love that had lit the barren peaks of existence had sunk into great darkness, and now nothing but cold, cheerless realities remained.

Long she had sat with the letters that had cost her so much misery trampled beneath her feet, when at last a ray of hope began to dawn upon her. Perhaps, after all, she had been a little premature. Some other cause—mysterious, indeed, but still admitting of explanation—might yet be at the root of Arthur's silence. Her mother seemed to speak more of what might happen than of what had actually happened. And, after all, Florence's letter might, perhaps, bear a harmless interpretation when her simple, impulsive character was taken into account.

So reasoned the good angel Hope in the dim depths of the girl's heart. Gradually the idea gained ground. It seemed to grow in probability, fostered tenderly and carefully as it was, by the wish that is father to the thought. The first paroxysm of feeling over,

Louise began to grow more and more hopeful that all might yet be well. She dried her eyes, she picked up the letters, and, when Justine came to summon her to her aunt, that domestic found her in a state of tolerable calmness. Yet, however it should end, the soul of Louise had passed, in that hour, through a terrible ordeal, which must leave for ever its traces on her character. She was no longer what she had been. She had now passed through a baptism of fire—she had been initiated into the deepest and most awful mysteries of human feeling—she had undergone the circumcision-rite of a torn and bleeding heart, and henceforth there must needs for ever mingle with the weakness of the woman some portion of that alien fierceness which springs to birth—like the armed Minerva from the painstruck Jove—only from the loftiest and most imperial excitement of which humanity is capable.

CHAPTER VII.

A COLONIAL BISHOP.

MISS ROSS'S Establishment for Young Ladies was renowned, not only in Bonn, but in many parts of England. Could she and did she not refer the doubting to deans, honourables, prebendaries, and even a colonial bishop? What more could the average Englishman want in selecting a school for his daughters? If erudition, combined with respectability, could not be secured under such auspices, it were surely vain to hope for them at all. If Minerva did not throw her *ægis* over such an establishment, she was obviously unfit for her duties, and might betake herself to the society of her owls as soon as convenient. Thus reasoned the average Englishman, with a little less than his average good sense. Meanwhile Miss Ross profited abun-

dantly by the reputation in which she was held. No saint ever wore his aureole after so lucrative a fashion. It was indeed, in her case, golden. Every honourable contributed another ray from El Dorado, every dean acted as a sort of philosopher's stone in her behalf, and, as to the Colonial Bishop, his own revenues were as nothing in comparison of those he caused to flow into Miss Ross's coffers. In fact, the bishop, though called "my lord," and privileged to wear gaiters, which revealed with painful distinctness the enormity of his feet, was a very wild, unkempt, though harmless, man, who, finding his diocese a little wilder than himself, was generally to be met with in Pall Mall, or turning into the office of the "Society for the Promulgation of the Gospel in Distant Parts." It was from this society he derived his somewhat limited income, and he seemed to regard it in consequence as a kind of estate, to be visited as often as possible with the view of seeing what improvements might be effected. *Au reste*, the Bishop of British Polynesia was a good, amiable, narrow-minded man enough, who possessed his soul in the most saintly patience so long as

he was permitted to remain undisturbed in his London haunts, but who was apt to be provoked to more than apostolic wrath when the radical organs of the press adverted sneeringly to the fact that, out of forty colonial bishops, twenty-seven were at that moment in England, and "believed" that one of them—the Bishop of British Polynesia—had not been seen in his diocese for the last five years.

"It is scandalous!" the good bishop would exclaim, trembling with indignation. "These rascally penny-a-liners ought to be muzzled. As if I were not doing far more good here than in British Polynesia!"

This might be true enough, but his radical enemy had an answer, as the bishop well knew, even to this. It was somewhat after the following fashion that the *Daily Scalpel* was wont to scarify his lordship:

"It is to the profane mind by no means unintelligible that these dignitaries may be, as they themselves sometimes aver, of more use in this country than in their own dioceses. A very moderate degree of usefulness in this country would suffice to establish

the fact to the satisfaction of all those who have watched them in their more distant spheres of labour. But, then, one is forced to ask, 'What is the use of such functionaries at all?' If, for instance, the Bishop of British Polynesia is as useful in the purlieu of Pall Mall as when cruising amongst his own anthropophagous catechumens, why take the trouble to call him 'Bishop' and to commit these dusky converts to his especial charge? It is hard enough to have to tolerate the drones that we have had the honour of inheriting. (This was a slap at the House of Lords.) But it is really a little too bad to create new ones under the name of Colonial Bishops. We know very well that these amiable old gentlemen have generally excellent reasons for being in England. Commend us to a bishop, even before a lawyer, for 'showing cause.' But in this case we doubt very much if they will obtain '*a rule nisi*' at the Bar of Public Opinion. They themselves seem, however, to think that they are the victims of a perpetual '*ne exeat regno*,' &c., &c."—(Here the gentleman who "did" the philippics for the *Daily Scalpel*, and who was a barrister by profession, got

upon a series of legal allusions which were more amusing to himself than to the general public.)

To such attacks was the poor Bishop of British Polynesia perpetually exposed. And, strange to say, he never got used to them. His skin never thickened under the castigating process. The fact was, the good man had still the relics of a conscience, albeit an episcopal one, and was not without his own twinges of remorse at deserting his diocese for such lengthened periods. Not but what he stoutly defended himself to himself:

“Am I not,” he would say, “collecting funds for Guano-Island Cathedral? and what better object can a man have than *that*? And did I not, only this morning, receive eighteen-pennyworth of stamps for that purpose in an unregistered and unstamped letter, which would certainly have miscarried had it been sent to me in my diocese?”

With that, the worthy man would take his shovel-hat, button his coat over the emblematic apron, and vouchsafe the pious dwellers in Pall Mall a solemn vision of episcopal gaiters. He would make his way to the S.P.G. office,

and would inquire for letters, and for the latest news of his diocese.

"Any talk yet of dividing British Polynesia?" he would ask of the obliging Secretary.

"Well, yes, my lord. The point is being seriously mooted."

"And quite time too," the Bishop would respond. "I really find the work more than I can manage."

The Secretary rejoiced in too high a moral training to doubt a bishop's word. Else would he have been obviously unfit for his post. He could only admire his lordship's indomitable perseverance in sticking to Pall Mall, in spite of the extra work this separation from his diocese must necessarily entail upon his already over-worked energies.

"You have not yet heard, I suppose, from Miss Curdett Flutes about increasing the stipends of the Colonial Bishops? It is really almost impossible for us to meet the incessant calls upon us in such poor uncivilized regions."

"No, my lord. We have heard nothing very lately on this point. You see this Nopenso business is so awkward. No one likes to endow a bishopric, when it may prove only


to be founding a chair for a Professor of Heresy."

"Bother Nopenso!" exclaimed the bishop, driven out of all episcopal propriety by the thought of the pecuniary injury his brother hierarch was perchance doing him.

The well-bred Secretary pretended not to notice the exclamation. Doubtless, too, the recording angel, as he noted it in his book, blotted it out at the same moment, like Uncle Toby's oath, with a tear. For is it not thus that bishops should be treated?

The bishop would next open his letters, carefully placing any stamps and Post Office orders they might contain in his pocket-book, and would then go home to enter them duly in a large ledger, on which were printed in gilt letters on a red ground the words, "Subscriptions for Guano-Island Cathedral."

At last, however, the bishop began to think that he must make a move. The *Daily Scalpel* had attacked him once again, and the Archbishop of Canterbury had been asked at dinner, by no less a personage than a royal duke, "why he didn't send that Bishop of British Polynesia out to his duty." This had



been duly retailed to the bishop, together with a conundrum, which had been prepared for H.R.H.'s after-dinner use, by a tame wit whom he kept about his person for convivial purposes.

"Why is the Bishop of British Polynesia like a man who does more than his duty?"

"Because he is only bound to live in a *see*, and he has really *an ocean* (a notion) of living at home."

This, His Royal Highness was pleased to say, after he had duly retailed it and collected the laughs of his auditors, a debt which, strange to say, was duly paid in every case, without a single defaulter appearing—this struck him (H.R.H.) as by no means bad. Singular to relate, it struck the Bishop of British Polynesia as a very poor joke indeed. But then he had not had the advantage of hearing it direct from royal lips.

However this might be, the bishop came to the conclusion that it was high time for him to be off. But he could not yet make up his mind to face the long dreary voyage round Cape Horn to his stercoraceous metropolis. It was necessary that he should vanish from

Pall Mall, but it seemed to the episcopal mind by no means equally necessary that he should wing his flight straight to Polynesia. At the least he might go a round-about way, and dally a little *en route*. He might surely elude the relentless animosity of his persecutors without flying so far as all that.

But whither should he go? The good bishop was a thorough Briton, and did not take kindly to foreigners. He had a dim, hazy idea that all Frenchmen were infidels, all Germans Rationalists, and that the foreigner in general was an unclean and wholly unepiscopal animal. Nevertheless, even the Continent was better than Guano-Island. If London was closed to him by the malice of his enemies, he would flee away and be at rest in the most English town he could think of on the Continent.

All at once his eye caught one of Miss Ross's circulars. At the same moment an idea, which seemed to him almost an inspiration, flashed across his mind. He would go to Bonn. There were numbers of English there. He need not trouble himself to learn the uncouth speech of the barba-

rians. He would go and live quietly at Bonn. He could even make a little episcopal display by preaching to the English congregation or holding a confirmation for his Right Reverend Brother of London. Yes, he would certainly go thither.

Then a second thought struck him. He would do yet more than this. He would honour Miss Ross with his august presence. He had lent her his name for as many years as he had been bishop—he would now lend her his person. She had rejoiced greatly in the shadow, now she should have the substance. He went at once to his writing-table and indited a note to the celebrated schoolmistress, mentioning the date at which she might expect him. He knew her sufficiently well to have no scruple in thus inviting himself. In fact, Miss Ross and he were Scotch cousins, and, besides, the bishop was well aware what deep obligations he had conferred upon the lady.

The next step was to summon a servant, and bid her (being only a Colonial Bishop he could not afford a valet) commence his packing. He then once more sallied forth, and made

his way to his Commissary to give him his future address.

“You might,” he added, with that significant parentheticalism which often makes more impression than the most decided request or command—“you might, perhaps, just see that the papers get hold of the right end of the stick. They are sure to misrepresent me, if they can.”

The Commissary was a shrewd man—how else should he have suited a Colonial Bishop? He needed but the lightest straw to catch the bearing of the wind. The next day the Bishop started for Germany, and in the evening papers there appeared a paragraph to this effect: “We understand that the Bishop of British Polynesia has left England on his way to his diocese.” “*On his way*”—but the paragraph did not add “*via* Germany.” What a thing it is to have a Commissary!


Thus it came to pass that, at the time of Lessing’s duel with Theodore Bonngart, the Bishop of British Polynesia was installed in Miss Ross’s house as a guest whom the mistress delighted to honour. It must at the same time be admitted that Miss Ross’s satis-

faction was by no means unalloyed. The honour was doubtless great, but then so was the expense. It was impossible to treat a gentleman, the possessor of actual gaiters and a possible cathedral, to the same rations as a bread-and-butter Miss. For instance, it was well understood that all bishops liked port-wine—not only so, but good port-wine—and good port-wine at Bonn was almost as costly as Cleopatra's *liqueur aux perles*. So, too, in the matter of eating. The good bishop exerted, unknown to himself, a most democratizing influence upon the *cuisine* of his hostess. All her old principles, which had cost her years of patient study to think out, and some hours of careful writing to formulate and copy, and which now hung—the grimmest *memento parcere*—nailed to the kitchen dresser, were utterly cancelled and annulled in a moment by this episcopal invader. He had, indeed, come like the prophet of some new culinary dispensation, waging a crusade to the death against all the old traditions of this feminine academy. At first even Miss Ross was almost paralysed by the violence of the blow. What with the honour, on the one

hand, of having a personage in her house, whom she might address at any given moment as "my lord," and the difficulty on the other, of discovering what lords generally ate, and then providing it, Miss Ross felt really for a time battered to and fro betwixt her own conflicting sensations—a kind of spiritual shuttlecock between two emotional battledores. It was as when one catches a rare and gorgeous bird, and nervously plies it with divers kinds of food, as doubting which it will take. Except, indeed, that Miss Ross had taken no pains to capture this beautiful specimen of the *Episcopus Colonicus*, and would very gladly any day have opened his cage and bidden him fly forth whither he would.

However, you get used even to a bishop in time, and Miss Ross grew accustomed at last to the scarecrow before which she had at first trembled. The bishop was after all very harmless. If he was not of much use in the world, at least he did no mischief, and this is saying a good deal even for a bishop. That he had no immediate intention of con-

tinuing his journey, was evident enough. It takes a long time to get to British Polynesia *via* Germany, and the bishop seemed well aware of the fact. His quarters, too, were very comfortable, and the bishop had lived too long in the world not to evince his gratitude for this blessing by remaining in them as long as possible. It would, he doubtless thought, show small courtesy and scant appreciation to be in a hurry to leave. Then, too, he was a bachelor, and, if such a remark may be adventured, he was by no means insensible to the attractions of feminine society. If his solid episcopal mind rejoiced greatly in Miss Ross's sound, didactic remarks, his eye was not altogether unobservant of those outward graces, in which, it must be confessed, Miss Ross's four-and-twenty pupils somewhat surpassed their mistress. This was the only trait in his lordship's character that did not quite meet with Miss Ross's approbation. A daring, almost awful, idea, had once crossed her mind—whispered as yet only in its most secret recesses. And even there it had hardly taken logical form and consistency. It rested as yet on four



disconnected propositions, which she trembled to bring into syllogistic shape, scared by the dread of the Frankenstein conclusion she would thus create. She was forty-five—the bishop was a little over fifty. He was a bachelor, she a spinster. Here she stopped. *Que voulez-vous?* It is no sin to mention facts. Let those stand abashed who rashly draw deductions.


And yet, somehow or other, Miss Ross was grieved at the attention the bishop seemed to pay to some of her young charges. It was not that she wished to monopolize his attentions herself. O, dear no! Of this she was quite sure. It was an entirely disinterested sorrow at what seemed to her an unworthy levity in the episcopal mind. *Tantæne animis cœlestibus nugæ?*

However, Miss Ross was by no means without feminine tact, and, little by little, this came to her aid. If she had any private schemes, her new arrangements were calculated to help them forward. With the utmost delicacy and consideration she gradually drew a kind of *cordon* round the poor bishop, and narrowed it day by day. At first he must not think of

breakfasting with them ; it was not good for his health to get up so early. He must have his breakfast later in her own private sitting-room. This was the first step, and to this his lordship consented with a very good grace, for a bishop, like other guardians of the public safety, is sometimes not unwilling to play the part of a somnolent Cerberus.

This first, and then the bishop must surely want a study. With all his diocesan work, it was impossible he could do without one. The bishop could not deny the soft impeachment. He had himself said more than once that he felt overwhelmed with business. He was still collecting postage-stamps for the Guano-Island Cathedral, which bade fair to be constructed entirely out of these somewhat flimsy materials. So he gave way, not without many thanks to his considerate hostess, little suspecting, poor man, that this was only another stage in his gradual but certain enslavement.

And now Miss Ross deemed the time ripe for a yet bolder step. It was impossible that a bishop could or should dine at half-past twelve o'clock. The bare idea was



absurd. But, besides this, it was evidently telling upon his lordship's health. He was getting perceptibly thinner every day. Miss Ross had noted it with pain and alarm, and felt it only right to mention it. It would never do for such a valuable life to be lost to the church for want of a timely warning. Unless he took her advice he would never be able to return to his diocese.

This latter consideration, it must be confessed, did not weigh much with the episcopal patient. But he was always rather nervous about his health, and Miss Ross's solemn, high-pressure, schoolmistress-like warning made a painful impression on his mind. But really this was a point which required consideration. It is true he much preferred a late to an early dinner. What bishop is there who can lay his hand upon his heart, and honestly say he does *not*? But then he was well aware that dining late involved a sacrifice.

"I do not like dining alone," he said, at length, after much reflection, "otherwise I should be very glad to accept your extremely kind offer."

Unlucky man! Now, indeed, Miss Ross had him in her power. She swooped down upon him at once.

"I hope to have the pleasure of always dining with you myself," she said cheerily.

The poor bishop smiled a very sickly smile indeed. He tried hard to shew his gratitude, but somehow or other the effort was too great for him. He could only stammer out :

"I was afraid you were obliged by your duties to dine in the middle of the day."

"I am obliged to preside, but not to dine," answered Miss Ross, still more cheerily.

The bishop subsided into silence. Not even a late dinner could reconcile him to this perpetual *tête-à-tête*. Yet it was impossible now to retract. He had alleged but one objection to the proposed arrangement, and that objection had been removed. It would be the height of rudeness to Miss Ross were he now to allege another. There was nothing for it but for him to resign himself to his fate.

As to Miss Ross, she was in an ecstasy at the success of her scheme. The *cordon* had now been narrowed sufficiently. The bishop was confined, when in the house, to his own

study, which was also her sitting-room. He took no meal with the rest of the household. Any levity in regard of the young ladies was thus effectually prevented. Not only so, but this system had the further merit of enabling its enterprising originator to return to those principles of economy on which she had so long conducted her academy. No need now to feed the whole establishment on meat three times a-day. No need any longer to treat the young ladies to the wine, which they were almost beginning to regard as a matter of course at dinner. The bishop might have everything very nice and comfortable, but, do what he might, he could not, single-mouthed, eat or drink his hostess into ruin. It was indeed a glorious triumph—a masterpiece of domestic strategy—a very Waterloo amongst the battles of economy. And if the bishop did not like it, what then? Why, *tant pis pour Mgr. l'évêque!*

— 1922 —

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— 1928 —

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— 1938 —

CHAPTER VIII.

BEFORE THE COUNTER.

• IT was while Miss Ross's household was thus honoured with an episcopal presence that Lessing determined, as he expressed it, to "look up his cousin." He had often before this felt that an obligation to do so lay heavy upon him. But somehow, even the certain heaviness of the obligation had never up to this time oppressed him quite so much as the probable heaviness of the she-dragon who guarded the educational Hesperides in which his cousin was confined. Lessing had a mortal dread of serious, didactic people. He was a butterfly that could barely exist out of the sunshine. "You may learn," he used to say, "a great deal from such people, if you have only the strength—*I*, unfortunately, have *not*. I feel, in the company of a school-

mistress or a professor, as if some human vampire were sucking all the blood out of my veins and replacing it by a decoction of 'square root,' tincture of lexicon, or some such succedaneum.

'O, no, it is for life I pant—
More life and fuller that I want—'

it is real, honest, vivifying blood that I require, not the pretty carmine injection of an anatomical preparation." And, if Lessing could not away with didactic people still less could he stomach people who patronized him. He might be young—it was hard to struggle against that fact—but, at any rate, he was a man and an American. He held himself, in consequence, equal to everybody in everything. And, besides this national form of vanity, he possessed to a somewhat unusual extent a personal variety of the same distemper. The Lessing self-complacency grafted upon transatlantic self-sufficiency was certainly enough to render anyone a very dangerous subject for the conversational operation of "letting-down." And Lessing was well aware that Miss Ross was not only by nature and profession didactic, but also was much given to

patronize, especially in the case of those whom she condescendingly termed her "younger friends." Add to this that Miss Ross's opinion of "younger friends" of the masculine gender was decidedly unfriendly, and it will not perhaps be a matter of wonder that Lessing should have postponed his visit to his cousin until the present time. Had he been aware that a bishop was in reserve for him—a kind of episcopal rod-in-pickle—it is doubtful whether his courage would not have failed him even now.

His anxiety to see his cousin had been growing strangely upon him of late. He felt he must not delay any longer the fulfilment of his cousinly duties. It was singular, too, that when he talked of his cousin, who was a tall, commanding brunette, there always danced before his mind's eye the vision of a much smaller figure, with roguish hazel eyes peeping out archly from under a jaunty little hat. And the more this vision danced before him, the more decidedly did he say: "Yes, I must certainly go and see my cousin. It is very wrong of me to have neglected her so long."

He dressed himself with even more than his

usual care. His boots and gloves were, in particular, perfect. Diamonds glittered on a snowy shirt-front. As he emerged from the dingy house he looked like young Phœbus on the hills of morning. The whole street seemed to glitter as he passed swiftly down it. The strange, dull German inhabitants of the Spinnerstrasse were startled into momentary excitement.

“*Gott im Himmel, welche Leute sind diese Amerikaner !*” (Gracious me ! what people these Americans are !)

“*Bleiben doch immer unverstündlich !*”
(One can never make them out !)

Meanwhile, unconscious of the comment he excited, Lessing made his way towards Herr Bonngart's house. He still dreaded the approaching encounter with the “she-dragon.” He felt he would give anything for a companion. Perhaps Arthur might be induced to accompany him. He reached Herr Bonngart's house and rang the bell. He was ushered into the *Gesellschaftszimmer*. Gretchen would tell Herr Forn, who was at that moment up-stairs in the study, giving the Fräulein Löffel a lesson.

"Ho ! Ho !" thought Lessing, "the murderer is out. I suspect the Fräulein Löffel is rather pretty, and I am sure the Herr Forn is very sly."

In a few moments Arthur came down :

"To what am I indebted for this vision of splendour ?" he asked, looking comically at Lessing's elaborate toilette.

"Do not lay the flattering unction to your soul that it is intended for *you*. I am bound on a most awful enterprise."

"Why, what a paladin you are ! *El Cid Campeador* was a trifle to you. What is it now ? A distressed damsel to be rescued, or a rival knight to be encountered in the lists ?"

"Far worse than either—a she-dragon to be attacked in her lair !"

"I understand. A visit to Miss Ross is on the *tapis*."

"I guess you're right. And I want you to come with me."

"Why ?" asked Arthur laughing. "Surely I should be *de trop* at such a touching interview as yours promises to be ?"

"It's all very well to laugh, but really it's no joke facing such a woman. She has already

called me a 'young gentleman,'" added Lessing, in whose "deep mind" this "judgment" had been most carefully "stored-up;" "and who knows to what lengths she may not carry her insults after *that*?"

"Then why give her the chance?" asked Arthur maliciously.

"You know I want to see my cousin," answered Lessing, vainly endeavouring to look serious as he perpetrated the audacious 'economy;' "and I cannot get at her except in this way."

"True; Miss Ross is 'the awful portal leading to your joy.' But why didn't you tell me before that Miss Martin was your cousin?"

"I have not told you so now. I am going to visit my cousin Sophy Warren. I hope, by-the-by, I am not disturbing you at your lesson," he added, determined to throw a shell into the enemy's camp.

"Thank you, we had just finished," replied Arthur very gravely. "But, Ilty," he continued, "I really don't see how it is possible for me to go with you. I have never been introduced to Miss Ross. I haven't the faintest or most distant acquaintance with

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her. Neither have I, like you, a cousin at the school. I am afraid I should only make your visit still more suspicious."

Lessing could not but acknowledge that his friend was right.

"What you say is very true," he replied. "I was so anxious to have your company that I did not think of these difficulties. I see I must go alone. But just tell me, there's a good fellow, what I'd better say if she calls me a 'young gentleman' again?"

"'Old lady' is the most deadly counter-thrust. But I should keep that for the very last extremity. It is too late to get up Lord Chatham's answer to the same reproach, as translated by Dr. Johnson into his own stupendous style. *Au sérieux*, however, I should take no notice of that or any other imperfections of language, into which the good lady may be betrayed. Pocket them all with martyr-like equanimity. You know there is no disgrace in standing anything from a lady. And your great object should be to win Miss Ross."

"Win Miss Ross!" exclaimed Lessing, with a ludicrous expression of surprise and

disgust. "What a prize! I think she must have already been won at a cheap raffle on her first entrance into the world. It is the only way in which I can account for her presence upon earth. She can never have been born in the ordinary fashion. However, you are right. She must be conciliated. Assist me, ye gods and little fishes!"

So saying he seized his hat, and prepared to continue the enterprise single-handed.

"You will come round and look me up this evening, to learn the result?" he asked.

"Certainly," said Arthur, "if I possibly can."

"What! you haven't surely to give another lesson so soon? If so, I know there's no chance of seeing you."

And without waiting for a reply, the young American rushed from the room in an artificial energy of excitement, which he fondly hoped would last him until he had encountered the dragoness.

Left alone, Arthur pondered long and painfully. The contrast between his own position and that of his friend could not fail to strike a mournful chord in his breast. Lessing's

life was all joy and hope, his own all disappointment and sorrow. If the young American's attachment to Miss Martin were real and deep, it was not very likely that it would meet with any insuperable obstacles. Lessing was rich and handsome, and had already done something to win the young lady's heart. He might confidently expect the most prosperous issue to his suit, and any little temporary obstacles that might present themselves would only add a new zest and piquancy to the delicious draught of love.

But with Arthur how different was it! A life of constant unhappiness and disappointment had written deep lines upon his face, and sown streaks of grey in his hair, whilst he was still under thirty. Domestic troubles, fierce mental conflicts, the shipwreck of a life's hopes on the treacherous rock of an illusive affection—these had been his portion up to the present time. And, now, what was his state? He was—he felt it more intensely every day—passionately, desperately in love with Florence Lovell. And yet this was a love which seemed to him from the very outset to be hopeless. It was not merely that

he was eleven years older in the chronicles of time than she. It was that time had dealt so hardly with him—that he was really so much older than his birth-date intimated. It was also that he was poor, a kind of exile from his country. Worst of all, there was that barrier which his keen sense of honour deemed insuperable. Well and wisely then did he resolve—not, indeed, to stifle this love, for that would have been the rankest murder and sacrilege—but to conceal it with utmost care—to let no faintest symptom escape of the consuming fever within. Even at the best he would have had little hope (he thought)—old and careworn as he was—of winning the heart of a young girl like Florence. Under more happy circumstances—such was the fastidious nobility of his nature—he would hardly have made the attempt. He would have deemed it almost an act of sacrilege to strive thus to burst into the sacred temple of a young heart, when he himself was, from age and sorrow, incapacitated, as he thought, from ministering at the altar. It would have seemed to him, in his exaggerated quickness of sensibility, that he had

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no right, by dint of his coarse animal magnetism, to press presumptuously into the affections of one who would naturally desire a younger suitor. But, under present circumstances, the idea was barely allowed to shape itself into words. He would indeed, he thought, be a monster of baseness were he, by word or deed, to attempt to win the love of one, whose affection he had no right to return. So he devoured his heart in silence and in solitude. It was a hard and bitter lot, but what use was it for men's souls to defy the lightning of Fate?

One thing he ought to have done, and done at once. He should have quitted the enchanted spot. But it was now too late. The presence of the beloved-one was the very atmosphere of his being. He could not live without her. In her he seemed to have the only existence that was worth the name. Though he might not tell his love—though he might not hope or even strive to win hers in return—it was still something to see her and to be near her. It was something—yea, much to a poetic soul—to bask in the sunlight of her smile : to be thrilled by the music of her voice : to float half-sunken in the rip-

pling splendour of her beauty. He could not tear himself away. His soul was no more his own, it was bound hand and foot in the strong chains of an absorbing passion. It had gone forth from himself like a loving light-ray from one planet to another, and could never more return. Blot out that other planet from the spiritual universe, and his soul must perish also. Nought would then remain but the coarse, shell-like principle of vitality whence all light, and love, and sweetness were for ever fled.

All this did not so much pass through Arthur's mind as rested perpetually in his consciousness. What wonder, then, if at times, as now, he was melancholy? To be ever longing for what you feel to be, at one and the same time, an absolute necessity, and an absolute impossibility—what mental strain can compare with this?

All at once the door opened, and Florence entered the room. Arthur's face brightened immediately.

"I'm so glad you're here!" exclaimed the young lady. "I was so afraid you might have gone out."

"I gather from this that you want me to do something."

"Of course. I have given up my shyness in asking favours of you. Besides, this is one you promised to do me."

"It is very stupid of me, but really I forget."

"Why, you promised to help me to buy something for Louise."

"So I did! I am at your service at any moment."

"Well, I am not quite ready, but, if you are sure you can spare the time, shall we start in five minutes?"

"Whenever you like best. You will find me waiting for you here."

It was more than five minutes before the young American re-appeared. When she did, she was dressed in a toilette at once so fashionable and in such good taste, that Arthur, for the second or perhaps third time in their acquaintance, looked at her dress instead of her face. Florence noticed the glance.

"How do you like my new mantle?" she asked, with the naturalness of a sister interrogating a brother. "*I think it very pretty.*"

"And so do I," answered Arthur, with equal *naïveté* and some approach to enthusiasm.

Florence looked pleased. She liked nice things—it belonged to the "fitness" of her nature to like them. She was essentially a thing of joy and beauty, and anything dull and sombre in thought or dress suited her as little as mourning apparel would a bride. And was she not, as it were, the bride of all that is best and loveliest in nature?

She and Arthur sallied forth. The latter had his misgivings as to whether this unchaperoned walk were quite according to rigid etiquette. Florence seemed to divine his thoughts.

"I know you are shocked at our going out alone together in this way. You English are nearly as bad as the Germans in that respect. I've been brought up so differently that it was at first very difficult for me to think of such things. But Frau Bonngart has been giving me so many hints that I am beginning at last to see the awfulness of my former views."

"Then there is, perhaps, some chance of amendment," said Arthur, laughing.

"Not the slightest. I am beginning to see

the European Right, but I prefer following the American Wrong. Our intercourse is so much less artificial, and more unrestrained."

"You go out walking with anyone you like, I suppose?"

"Not exactly, but with any acquaintance as much and as often as you please. The young ladies go out by themselves, and hold long conversations with the young gentlemen in the streets, and nothing is thought of it. In particular there is one institution which I assure you is very pleasant. If a gentleman is introduced to a lady at a party, he may call at her house the next day, and take her out for a *tête-à-tête* drive or even to the theatre. And the odd part of it is that no one thinks that they are necessarily going to marry in consequence!"

"I must allow your country can boast of Freedom in many phases. Fancy Frau Bonngart's feelings if one of your American friends were to venture upon such a performance here. No doubt she is shocked enough at our present escapade, though I am an old friend of hers, and a respectable middle-aged gentleman," added Arthur with a forced laugh.

"Since when have you taken that rank?" asked Florence, half-smiling and half-annoyed. "Had I known it earlier, I would not have asked you to come with me. I don't like middle-aged gentlemen as escorts."

"Thank you for your candour. Shall I turn back?"

"Yes; turn back to your proper age, and don't malign yourself."

"As if it were in my power! Only in my second infancy can I hope to be young again. But it is evident," added Arthur, whose meditation had left him unusually irritable, "it is evident that you at least are still delightfully young and hopeful. You think that the sun can be made to stand still for the bidding—that to wish and to have are synonymous."

Florence opened her large eyes very wide as she heard these somewhat rude remarks, uttered in a bitter sarcastic tone by her companion. He was evidently a little annoyed at the thought of his age, and for some to her quite inexplicable reason, Florence felt that she herself was also. She, too, answered a little sharply:

"How absurd you are! One would think

you were a patriarch of sixty !" Florence's imagination could scarcely carry her beyond this common age of juniors at the English Bar.

" Compared with you, Miss Lovell, at any rate, I feel a patriarch, and have perhaps been tempted to assume too much of a patriarch's privileges. I am nearly double your age."

The thought was wormwood to Arthur. He still vainly struggled with his annoyance, which was really born of his great but hopeless passion. Florence looked up with child-like earnestness into his face, and said :

" That would make you thirty-six. I am sure you are not that."

" No ! not quite, but I am nearly thirty."

" There, I knew I was right !" and Florence looked quite pleased. " You have no business to assume the patriarch on such very slender pretensions. What on earth makes you so melancholy this afternoon ? You are not unwell, I hope ?"

Florence said these last words in such a low sympathetic tone that it almost unmanned Arthur. He was not himself that afternoon. His gloomy meditations had unstrung his

mind, and he had thus been betrayed into an irritability which was very unusual with him, and for which he was already reproaching himself. And now Florence's tender sympathy touched his sensitive feelings to the quick. He had to make a great effort before he could reply, in his usual half-jesting, half-melancholy way :

"I am afraid I have been very rude and irritable, but I don't think the complaint is so obstinate as to call for a doctor. You evidently think," he added, laughing, "that all ebullitions of temper arise from a bad state of the body, like the man who defined Calvinism as 'a peculiar variety of religion, originating in a disturbed state of the digestive organs.'"

"And what is it really?" asked Florence, who, in her ignorance of religious sects, hardly saw the grotesqueness of the description.

"God chanting the Dirge of Humanity in a minor key, whilst Satan hums the 'Rogue's March,'" answered Arthur in a bold indignant metaphor, which would have been profane, but for the intense earnestness with which it was penetrated.

Florence again looked up in astonishment. The second definition sounded to her much more shocking than the first. But Arthur evidently meant it.

"I am afraid I do not yet understand you," she said. "I do my best, but you sometimes get beyond my depth. I suppose it is because I really know so little about religious matters. It is a great pity."

"I do not know that," answered Arthur solemnly. "'To believe' and 'to do,' are better than 'to know,'—or rather they are the only knowledge worth having. But here is your shop."

They entered the store, and Florence began ransacking it, in that way so pleasant to ladies, but, one would think, so inexpressibly troublesome to shopkeepers. Two women stood behind the counter, and eyed Arthur and Florence with no little curiosity. As Florence asked all her questions in English, which the women understood and spoke remarkably well, the latter did not give the two strangers credit for any knowledge of German, and occasionally exchanged remarks in an undertone in that language. Arthur heard with

some interest the following scraps of conversation.

"I suppose they are engaged."

"Let us hope so."

"It is a very odd custom to go out in this way alone together."

"It seems hardly proper."

"One can wonder at nothing with the English."

"True; they are an extraordinary nation."

"The gentleman seems, however, much older than the lady."

"Very likely. Perhaps he is rich."

Again was Arthur's spirit troubled. These random words stirred up once more its turbid depths. How hopeless must his case be when even the merest strangers were struck by the disparity in age between Florence and himself. After all, he had been right to call himself a patriarch. A patriarch he was, and such he would try to think himself.

And yet the thought smacked bitter as wormwood on his mental palate. It is one thing to know a fact yourself, quite another to have it thrust suffocatingly down your

throat by the first Philistine you chance to meet. In the former case you can treat the unwelcome visitor as debtors sometimes treat a bailiff—dress him up in the cast-off livery of some dismissed delusion—even make him minister at the Barmecide's feast of an unsubstantial hope. But what are you to do when the bailiff so far forgets himself as to knock you down in the street?—when the fact confronts you with its inexorable logic out of the mouth of a mere indifferent spectator?

There is in human nature an unhappy perversity—that *prava propensio* of which theologians discourse so learnedly—which forbids a man to grow content beneath the certainty, whilst he knows the irresistibility, of Fate. Had Arthur been ten years younger, he would still have been just as unable to urge his suit as he was now. A less superable barrier than that of age stood between him and his joy. But, for all that, he could not bear to think that this latter obstacle should be so patent to everybody. Was it so to Florence herself? Their recent conversation

permitted him to entertain a shadowy imperfect hope that it might not be—but who could say ?

He was rapidly falling into a brown study, when he was aroused by Florence's voice.

"Please come here, Mr. Vaughan, I want your opinion."

"They are not engaged, then ; that is still stranger," interpolated one of the observant shopwomen to her companion.

Arthur went to Florence's side. She was examining a beautiful writing-case of Russia leather, elaborately fitted-up within.

"Isn't this lovely !" she exclaimed, with all a child's glee at seeing a pretty thing. "There is everything : inkstand with an *cr-moulu* top ; gold pens ; silver pencil-case ; pink paper ; envelopes ; secret drawer—which every one knows where to look-for—a place for love letters, very large and private—all that any one can possibly want. This is just the very thing for Louise. Don't you think so ? Tell me you do, for I can't buy it otherwise, after dragging you here to help me choose ; and yet I have set my heart upon having it."

"I am quite ready to act the part of our House of Lords, and to ratify the decrees of the real governing body."

"No; a mere formal assent won't do. You must say you like it, and, what is more, you must really like it."

"Saying, then, does not inspire the belief that seeing is said to do?"

"Don't be so provoking! Go into raptures at once. Say you have never in your life seen anything half so pretty—that it is a fit present for a queen—that you admire my taste in selecting it, and all that. You are really very trying."

"I agree with every word you have uttered."

"Not, I hope, excepting the last remark of all."

"Certainly not. I am always 'trying'—to do my best."

"As if you could creep out of your difficulty through a pun-hole! However, I believe you are in earnest, so I shall choose this. How much is it, Fräulein?"

"Thirty thalers, Miss, and a very cheap article. It is so good."

Florence looked a little blank. The price was enormous. Her exclamations of delight had probably caused a sudden rise in the rate of exchange.

"I see the goodness," she answered, "but where is the cheapness?"

"Have you looked inside, Miss?" asked the shopwoman, intending to ignore Florence's question, but really supplying what seemed a jocose answer to it.

"There is no cheapness inside or outside," exclaimed Florence. "However, I must have it, I have set my heart upon it."

There was a good deal of the spoilt child in Florence, and she had but the vaguest idea of the value of money.

It was now Arthur's turn to interpose. He knew, from his tolerably long experience in Germany, that the prices first named at a shop are in general purely tentative, and not intended to be very rigidly adhered to. The purchase of the smallest and simplest article is generally a matter of separate and wearisome bargaining. You have to pursue even in the best shops that system of chaffering which in England prevails only in open market, or

at an apple-woman's stall. He said in a whisper to Florence,—

"Tell the woman that you will look at something else."

"But I don't want anything else," answered Florence, who never dreamed of bargaining. "O, yes, there is one thing I do want, and that is five thalers more. Can you lend them me?"

"Certainly, but you can get this desk for twenty thalers, if you like."

"It's such a bother," answered Florence. "Let's buy it at once, and take it home with us. I want so much to examine it more closely."

Arthur smiled at her eagerness and innocence of the ways of the world in general, and of German shopkeepers in particular. He said no more, but handed her the five thalers she required to complete the sum demanded. Miss Lovell was no doubt rich, and the ten thalers overcharged would benefit somebody.

Accordingly Florence paid the money, saw the desk carefully packed up, had a *Dienstmann* summoned to carry it home for her at

once, and then sallied forth from the shop in the highest glee at her success in choosing her present. The shopwomen exchanged meaning glances as the strangers left.

"They must be either very rich or very stupid," murmured the one in a pleased, purring tone—like that of a contented cat.

"They are English—one need say no more."

CHAPTER IX.

THE "SHE-DRAGON."

WHILST Florence and Arthur were thus employed, Lessing had taken heart of grace, and made his way boldly to the abode of the "she-dragon." He rang the bell valiantly, in fact with that almost defiant energy of tin-tinnabulation, which, to the practised ear, at once betrays the nervous visitor.

"Is Miss Ross at home?" he inquired, when the servant opened the door.

"Yes, sir."

"Can I see her?"

"I don't know."

The maid had had experience of her mistress's peculiarities, and was aware that it was by no means certain that a visitor of the "male persuasion" (unless indeed he belonged to the parental variety) would be admitted.

Lessing was half-inclined to turn back, but his manhood came to his aid. It should never be said that a Lessing was overcome by the first obstacle.

"Perhaps," he continued, "you will be good enough to take my card to Miss Ross, and ask if she can see me?"

The servant, a fat, good-natured, rather comely young woman, who shrewdly suspected the visitor's ulterior object in thus seeking an interview with the unprepossessing Miss Ross, and who herself played Marguerite to the Faust of a neighbouring shoemaker, at once conveyed the card and message upstairs. Unfortunately she left the drawing-room door open during the parley with her mistress, and Lessing, standing in the hall, heard with painful and aggravating distinctness the words :

"You can shew the young gentleman up."

It was too bad. Lessing almost choked with indignation. Before he had time to digest it, he found himself in the presence of his tormentor. Miss Ross was seated on a kind of music-stool, screwed up to its loftiest altitude. There was no back to it; Miss

Ross disapproved of such luxurious indulgences. During twenty years of school-keeping, her own back had acquired an inflexible rigidity that needed no adventitious or ancillary support. The woman was essentially hard throughout. Born originally of very tough material—a sort of human teak-wood, with Scotch bark—she had been undergoing throughout her life a kind of indurating process, which had at last resulted in a wonderful firmness and closeness of grain. As some stones get harder and harder the longer they are exposed to the action of the elements, so had Miss Ross gained perpetually in toughness and endurance from the stormy weather of her life. When first quarried out of the rock of humanity, it is to be presumed that even she had some soft, weak part about her, but, if so, it had long since disappeared. She was now like granite on a mountain-top. Impervious and inaccessible, she looked down upon mankind from her music-stool with a Diogenes-like contempt for their weaknesses and tendernesses.

Lessing had never had a good look at this

awful personage before. It is true he had seen her once in church, but whether her Gorgon-head had chilled into stone his religious enthusiasm, or some other cause had produced the effect—certain it is that he thenceforward honoured the injunction in the Catechism respecting the hearing of sermons more in the breach than the observance. Perhaps it was that his warm, ardent, impulsive temperament was rather checked than assisted in its religious strivings by the dulness of that dreary monologue which passes on the Continent by the name of "Divine Worship according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England." Lessing (Heaven forgive him !) hated the religion of long names, dry facts, and weary routine. He was at heart unaffectedly religious. But it was not in his nature to give vent to his devotion in cold logical formulæ. A thing of feeling himself, it was necessary that his religion should be rather the expression of a feeling than of hard, objective facts.

Mais revenons. He had seen Miss Ross once in church, but then she had been mel-

lowed by distance, and a veil had obscured her awful features, like that which hid from his followers the veiled Prophet of Khorassan. Once again had Lessing beheld her for a brief instant—yea, more, had even spoken with her. It was on the occasion when he had escorted his cousin and Miss Martin home ; but then again the grim lady's head had been muffled, and there had been no light to aid his vision beyond that of the portentous rush-light, which she had brought down from her bedroom. Now, however, he stood face to face with the she-dragon, in the broad garish light of a summer afternoon. He instinctively recoiled from the spectacle. If he had hated her from hearsay, he now loathed her for her look. The pale, yellowish face seemed carved in lance-wood ; every feature was stiff and rigid with the most immaculate and insufferable propriety. Each might have stood for the fleshly embodiment of a virtue. Unwearied industry stood with girded loins, in her eye ; majestic decision rode astride her nose ; ice-cold chastity found a congenial representative in her thin, bloodless lips. If

beauty were not to be desired in a modern-antique, she might have sate for a bust of Pallas. Hold! In one other respect did the resemblance between her and the cold Athenè break down and fail. Whatever other virtues Miss Ross might possess, Truth was not amongst the number. The Pandora-box that had been opened at her creation, had been kept open, after all, a little too long. If all the vices had escaped, and spread themselves over the earth, leaving her immaculate, one virtue had escaped also. Truth had flown forth and left Miss Ross imperfect. A low cunning was in fact the only approach to an expression that her Sphynx-like countenance possessed the power of assuming; and that she was capable of deceit was corroborated by the fact that her hair was false — false either in material or colour — Lessing could not tell which, and gave it, therefore, the credit of both.

As to dress, Miss Ross's style was classical in its extreme simplicity. She never gave way to flounces, or yielded to the unnatural luxury of crinoline. A sad-coloured gown,

constructed on the most economical principles (it took only eight yards to make Miss Ross's best Sunday merino), fitting tightly to the neck, tightly to the arms, tightly to the waist, and—must it be said?—tightly to the knees also, constituted her usual attire. There was hardly a fold or wrinkle anywhere in its whole extent, only one or two "gathers" at the waist. Happily Miss Ross had not a very high action when walking, otherwise it would have been a painful process to bend the knee sufficiently in the confined space which her dress allowed her. She generally wore gloves in the house, a custom supposed to be emblematic, and expressive of her constant horror of any, the slightest, pollution. She carried no ornaments of any kind, unless indeed the cap, wonderful and awful in shape, to which she was obliged to have recourse to keep her hair in its right place, might come under the denomination.

Such was the lady before whom Lessing stood and made his bow. The young American was usually graceful enough in his movements, but on this occasion there was a *gêne*

and constraint about the interview that rendered him almost *gauche*. He did, however, accomplish his bow. Miss Ross half rose (not quite) from her music-stool, and returned it grimly enough. The English habit of shaking hands with a visitor she found it convenient to ignore. She could be very German upon occasions.

Lessing stood dumbfounded for a moment at the iciness of his reception. Miss Ross took compassion upon him at length so far as to say, albeit in the most patronizing manner :

"Take a chair, Mr. Lesser."

Lessing grew still more indignant. This alteration in his name must have been made with the intention of ridiculing his stature. He might be small, but it was too bad to make him "lesser." However, Arthur's advice came to his mind : "You must try to win Miss Ross." How should he do it? It was a hard task, but surely the first step towards it was to take the chair she offered. Accordingly he turned round for this purpose. In so doing his eyes fell for the first time on a masculine figure, ensconced in an arm-chair to

the full as luxurious as Miss Ross's music-stool was uncomfortable. Lessing gave a little start; he could not help himself. It was such a curious figure, one totally unlike any that had ever yet crossed his field of vision. A tall, hungry-looking man (for in this respect the "colonial" presents a great contrast to the "home" variety of the episcopal species) with raw, unshapely features, conspicuous amongst which was a very large mouth, was regarding him with a half-puzzled, half-disgusted expression of countenance; but it was the quaintness of the creature's dress that struck the deepest astonishment into Lessing's mind.

It was not only that he was clothed in a suit of raven black. Lessing was aware that men of melancholy temperament, as clergymen, tailors, (for is there not a disease named "tailors' melancholy?") and undertakers, derive a grim satisfaction from the sadness of their apparel. Nay, he had even been told that the first of these classes, the clergy, had a dim traditional superstition that they were serving God the more excellently by contravening in

their dress every principle of art and beauty, that the Creator has revealed in the universe. He knew that there were some so-called "religious people," who looked upon the earth as a vast cemetery, with the clergy as its ghoul-like janitors. So on the whole the blackness of the stranger's vestments was intelligible. Not so, however, their shape and nature. To his infinite surprise and almost horror, Lessing noticed that the tall being he had fancied a man wore no trousers, but in place thereof, feminine stockings, and—could it be possible? yes, it was indeed true!—an apron!! For a moment his self-possession quite deserted him. He had bargained for Miss Ross—who was in good sooth virile enough—but how should he face this other yet more masculine woman? Such was the thought that shot painfully in the first moment of his surprise, through Lessing's bewildered brain. Another glance at the stranger demolished the conclusion so hastily formed. That was no woman's face, and, besides, the figure wore a coat and waistcoat. What then was it? Some strange, mysterious hermaphrodite, sent up to Mi-

nerva in mistake for Venus? Or merely a Hercules plying his distaff in the house of a local Omphale? He devoutly hoped and believed that this last was the case; but, however it might be, his American mind—unused to many distinctions in dress or dignity—experienced a sensation of unmitigated astonishment.

Miss Ross noticed his perplexity, which she interpreted as a tribute to the grandeur of the episcopal presence, and felt in consequence some slight additional importance reflected on herself. To this end, in fact, she was wont to entice the bishop out of his study into her drawing-room at the time when visitors might be expected. Less to relieve Lessing's embarrassment than to paralyze him still more completely by this display of her connexions, she said, with much dignity, and several vocal notes of admiration:

“The Lord Bishop of British Polynesia!!”

It was not so much an introduction as a notification, and Lessing remarked the slight. He felt, however, infinitely relieved. A bishop might be, and to him indeed was, a

very awful sort of being, but at least he was not so "uncanny," as an hermaphrodite. Moreover, the bishop was pleased to be gracious.

"I did not catch the gentleman's name," he said.

"I forgot. I am sure I beg your pardon, my lord," answered Miss Ross, still determined to snub poor Lessing. "The young gentleman" (again the American winced) "is Mr. Lesser from America, cousin to one of my pupils."

"Lessing, not Lesser!" interposed Ilty, more calmly than might have been expected.

"Lessing! Lessing!" repeated the bishop, in that vivid conversational manner, which the example of George the Third has made so familiar to the English. "Lessing! Lessing! Surely I have heard the name before."

"No doubt, sir," answered the American, who would have died rather than address any one as "my lord." "He was a German writer."

"Ah! I thought so, a great German—writer did you say, or general? O yes, to be sure, writer. He wrote some very able re-

ligious commentaries, I think—or parables was it? I seem to remember something about him in connection with Nathan and David.”

“I think, sir, you must be referring to his work, ‘Nathan the Wise.’”

“Quite so. No doubt. Then it would be Nathan and Solomon, not David—for it was Solomon, as you know, that was so famous for wisdom.”

“‘*Nathan der Weise*’ is, however, hardly a religious commentary,” said Lessing, with great suavity, as wishing to be gentle with the bishop’s ignorance.

“Perhaps not—perhaps not. It is a very long time indeed since I read it. I really don’t know when it was” (the statement was remarkably correct), “but it must have been before you were born.”

Lessing shrewdly suspected it must have also been before the bishop was born. Certainly, in this world, the latter had never read a line of German. The bishop, however, continued in the ponderous episcopal manner in which great men beat out what they fancy to be a grain of gold.

“‘Hardly commentary.’ You are right—

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at any rate, not avowedly so—at least, not avowedly religious commentary—or, perhaps, to be more correct, I should say, not avowedly religious commentary written with a definite theological purpose. But, on the other hand, it is hardly possible to discuss the characters of Nathan and Solomon without having the most solemn religious thoughts forced upon the mind. In the one case we see how much good a man may do without rank or wealth—in the other, how pernicious the influence, and how unhappy the life, of even a monarch who neglects his duty."

Lessing listened in mingled astonishment, depression and perplexity. What, he thought, is the good, quaint old scarecrow driving at? What has the German writer's drama to do with all these admirable, but rather irrelevant, reflections?

Not so, however, was it with Miss Ross. She listened to the words that fell from the episcopal lips with an admirable appearance (or, perhaps, reality) of interest. The bishop looked pleased with her attention, as well as with the happiness of his own effort. He considered he had now done his part in the

conversation, and fell back into the recesses of his original silence.

Lessing took up the parable—

“I called, ma’am,” he said, “partly to do myself the honour of waiting upon you—partly to inquire how my cousin is.”

“Miss Warren is very well, I thank you,” answered Miss Ross repellently.

“Could I be allowed to see her?” asked Lessing, after a pause. He had expected that Miss Ross would have made the offer, and he anticipated now, that, at any rate, he would be permitted a private interview.

“O, certainly,” answered Miss Ross, still more coldly. So saying, she rang the bell. The same buxom servant appeared as had admitted Lessing.

“Johanna, tell Miss Warren she is wanted in the drawing-room?”

Johanna disappeared. There was an awkward interval, during which Miss Ross sat more rigid than ever on her music-stool, and Lessing contemplated his boots. The good bishop followed the direction of Lessing’s eyes and also contemplated the young American’s boots. He was struck by their smallness and neatness.

Instinctively he drew in his own enormous banyan-like ramifications of distorted toes, insurgent bunions and protuberant corns, and regretted, for the first time in his life, that he was so prominently plantigrade. He raised his eyes higher, until they were caught by the glitter of the two large diamonds in Lessing's shirt-front. The bishop did not like Americans, but he had a partiality for diamonds, and a certain respect for those that could afford to wear them. He condescended to renew the conversation.

"Mr. Lessing," he said, with solemn gravity—"Mr. Lessing, what do you think of the English Church here?"

("Sutor, ne supra crepidam," thought Lessing. "The bishop is sticking this time to his last. He won't come to such grief now as he did over German literature.")

"I can't say I like it much," he answered, with courageous frankness.

Miss Ross turned up the yellows of her eyes in pious horror. The Bishop had intended to laugh, but, noting the expression of his hostess's face, he changed his mind and his countenance at the same time. The result

was a curious facial contortion which struck Lessing as irresistibly comical. It was as when one tastes a sugar-plum and meets with a bitter-almond in the middle.

"What is there you do not like in it?" asked the bishop, with a solemnity in which some severity was now mingled. "I preached there myself last Sunday, and noticed nothing to disapprove of."

"O no, sir, nothing whatever to disapprove of, and I like the chaplain extremely. He is a particularly agreeable man, and has been very kind to me. But I like a different sort of service."

"You are never a Ritualist?" asked Miss Ross, with unfeigned horror.

"Or a Rationalist?" groaned the bishop.

Lessing felt he was on dangerous ground.

"I hope I am neither," he said. "I don't cultivate any 'isms.' But I like more music and a heartier service."

Miss Ross looked at him, as if searching for the Mark of the Beast on his forehead. "A heartier service" must mean Ritualism, and the schoolmistress regarded all "Ritualistic services" much as the chaste Diana

may be supposed to have regarded the rites of the Paphian goddess.

Luckily at this moment Sophy entered the room, and the cousins greeted each other warmly—too warmly in fact to please Miss Ross, who said, very gruffly :

"You can sit down, Sophy."

The bishop again roused himself. He was not, nowadays, often allowed to enjoy the society of the young ladies of the establishment, and he was anxious to make the best use of the present opportunity. Miss Warren was tall and handsome, but a little too commanding in her appearance to suit every taste.

"I hope you are quite well, Sophy," said Lessing, by way of commencing the conversation—a task which he felt to be extremely difficult in the withering, blighting light of Miss Ross's stone-grey eyes.

"She ought to be well enough," interpolated Miss Ross, sarcastically. "If she is not, it isn't from overwork."

Sophy thought it judicious to take no notice of this interruption ; but her tact failed her in her reply to Lessing.

"O, I'm all right, thank you. How are you? None the worse, I hope, for your duel? We——"

"Your duel!" ejaculated Miss Ross, brandishing her black, measly gloves in mingled horror and indignation.

"Duel!" echoed the bishop, growing rapidly green with sympathetic disgust.

"My lord," continued Miss Ross, as if seeking justice and protection at the shrine of the Church—"my lord, this young gentleman has fought a duel!"

She evidently expected his lordship to break out in holy horror and severe rebuke. And the bishop himself was not indisposed to do so. It would have been an excellent opportunity of airing his peculiar eloquence. But he was aware that citizens of the United States are singularly sensitive in regard of personal interference, and have sometimes a most uncivilized way of evincing their susceptibility. His brief experience at Guano Island, where there were several American colonists, had convinced him of this fact. In the first bloom of his newly-acquired episcopal dignity he had heard one of these gentlemen give utterance

to a long string of those *epea pteroenta*, which are commonly known by the name of oaths. The bishop had been grieved, as well by the profanity of the performance as by the disrespect it implied to his person and office. Stepping up to the offender, he had ventured to say, mildly, but with dignity: "My good man, do you know what you are saying? Your language is not only blasphemous, but, in point of fact, improper."

The Yankee had stared at him for one brief instant in blank astonishment. Then, inserting his hand deliberately into the tail-pocket of his coat, he had drawn forth thence a revolver and applied it, with much precision, to the episcopal head. At the same time he had called, in a rollicking voice, to a friend in the distance—

"Jest come here, Bill, and listen to this tarnation old hoss afore I kill him. He's a cussing and swearing like greased lightning."

How the bishop had ever escaped alive from the clutches of that man of Belial, he had himself never clearly understood, but the incident had remained vividly impressed upon his mind, and had perhaps contributed addi-

tional weight to his numerous reasons for disliking his diocese. Since then he had always been very careful in his remarks to or about Americans. With respect to them, at any rate, he held silence to be golden. It was true that, on the present occasion, he could detect no sign of a latent "six-shooter" in the young American's pocket, but then a gentleman who wore diamonds would probably have his defensive weapon constructed in the neatest and smallest fashion. And yet even a very tiny bullet was more than the bishop felt he had room for in his head. When, therefore, he was thus appealed to by his hostess, instead of responding to those indignant words, "This young gentleman has fought a duel!" by a lecture and reproof worthy of the occasion, he held it to be judicious to answer simply--

"So it seems."

It was a cowardly and unworthy reply. Miss Ross felt that her idol was in imminent danger of shattering. But then she knew nothing of that little episode on Guano Island. Besides, in simple justice to the bishop, it should be added that he accompanied these seemingly over-prudential and almost mean-

ingless words with a Burleigh shake of the head, that was, at the same time, perfectly safe and inimitably expressive. It was that solemn lateral motion which seems to imply that the head is so full that the greatest care is necessary to avoid spilling any of its contents. It was the most perfect expression of the "I could an' I would" philosophy.

As to Lessing and Sophy, they both felt uncomfortable. The latter regretted having thoughtlessly brought such an unpromising subject on the *tapis*, whilst, for the instant, Lessing felt as guilty under Miss Ross's indignant outburst as did Warren Hastings when listening to Burke's impassioned denunciation. He tried, however, to laugh it off.

"It was not a regular duel, Miss Ross—only a sort of sham-fight—a game at swords."

But Miss Ross was not to be choked-off in this way. If the bishop neglected his duty, all the more need for her to set him a noble example.

"I think, Mr. Lesser, it is a great pity to try to make light of these things. I always tell my young ladies that the next best thing to not committing a fault is frankly to acknowledge it, when committed."

The bishop nodded his head approvingly. Thus far he might venture to go without incurring danger, and the pantomime might be accepted by Miss Ross in lieu of words.

Lessing, however, was almost beside himself at the impertinence of the rebuke. He felt that he could not stand this style of interview any longer. He murmured a few incoherent words to Sophy and then took up his hat to go. Miss Ross, however, had not yet done with him.

"You seem satisfied with a very short interview with your cousin," she said, sneeringly.

This taunt was the last feather that broke the back of Lessing's patience.

"I had hoped to see her *alone*," he answered, with marked emphasis, as he left the room.

"Your cousin seems rather a rude young man," resumed Miss Ross, addressing Sophy, as soon as the door was closed. "Is he always like this?"

Sophy knew better than to attempt to retort. She remained silent until the bishop, wishing to utilize the shining moments during

which he was privileged to enjoy her society, commenced a conversation with her. It was but short-lived. Miss Ross nipped it in the bud by saying—

“Miss Warren, you had better resume your studies.”

CHAPTER X.

THE PLOT THICKENS.

AS has been already said, Frau Bonngart spent a considerable portion of her day in bed, but, when she was up, she made very good use of her time. Not only was she by nature suspicious, but she had also been provided by nature with extraordinary detective instincts. It was impossible that any mystery, which impinged ever so slightly upon her own orbit, should long elude the penetration of Frau Bonngart. It is true she sometimes evolved mares'-nests out of her own inner consciousness, and "nosed" such purely imaginary scents, that the "cover" was occasionally "drawn blank." But this was an error on the right side. She may have invented a few fanciful mysteries, but, at least, no actual one escaped her. In this behalf her devotion to

her couch stood her in good stead. It was there, and there alone—reclining in solitude and calm—that she was able to follow out the trains of thought, that had been suggested to her by the incidents she had witnessed or suspected in her more active moments. Whether Frau Bonngart were really an invalid or not, was doubtful, but there could be no doubt that she was not naturally indolent. “Without all controversy,” great was the activity of her intellect. Though not over well educated, she was sharp, shrewd, and sagacious to the last degree. Infinite were the subtle ramifications of her mind. She was always plotting or counterplotting—not, indeed, in any very criminal way, but with an ingenuity and perseverance that would have secured her high distinction in the diplomatic world.

It has already been seen, from her letter to Louise, that Frau Bonngart had for some little time been rather suspicious of the relations in which Arthur and Florence might stand to each other. She had all a mother’s pardonable eagerness to marry her daughter well, and, though she might have preferred a

more distinguished suitor than Arthur, yet she was quite content that she should become the bride of a well-to-do Englishman—and such she considered Arthur to be. Besides, Louise had already rejected so many good offers, and had, in fact, seemed so little disposed to submit herself to the matrimonial yoke, that Frau Bonngart had begun to have serious apprehensions that she might never marry at all. One such disaster had already happened in the family. Theresa was a standing memento of the danger of delay. At one time an acknowledged beauty, she had now stiffened into the most unmistakable of old maids.

Therefore it was that, when Frau Bonngart's lynx eyes had first detected symptoms of a favourable inclination on the part of Louise to Arthur, she had noted the fact with no small satisfaction. At the same time she was far too good a matrimonial cook to run any risk of spoiling the broth by over-early stirring. On the contrary, she gave no sign of intelligence, but left things to take their own course, except when, by the exercise of a little guarded *finesse*, she could throw the

young people more together, or pour a sly, and apparently spontaneous, encomium of the one into the ear of the other.

After a time, however, when she had become more thoroughly convinced of the fact of her daughter's attachment, Frau Bonngart's diplomacy had assumed another phase. She had not given Louise openly and verbally to understand that she was aware of the real state of affairs. This would have necessitated explanations and arrangements, that might even yet be premature. It was still best to let the young plant make its own way upward. But Frau Bonngart had succeeded in conveying to Louise that there was a kind of tacit understanding between them respecting this matter—that she, Frau Bonngart, was by no means blind to what was going forward, but that—so far from wishing to interfere—she hoped that it would have a successful issue, and left it to the sagacity of her daughter to accomplish this result.

And in thus acting Frau Bonngart showed very considerable acuteness. Few women had less delicacy of feeling than she—but she was clever enough to have a dim conception

how this delicacy of feeling might operate in others. She herself believed very little in love and romance—Herr Bonngart, certainly, was a stumbling-block to anything of the kind—but she had a great faith in marriage and comfort. And both professionally, as a mother, and personally, as *the* mother of Louise, she was anxious to see the latter satisfactorily settled. She had learnt, however, from experience, that there was a good deal more romantic nonsense in her daughter's head than in her own. Louise never seemed to take kindly to the "settling" theory. Her mind seemed always to rise beyond sofas, and stoves, and dresses, and dinners, into some cloudy region, whither her practical mother was unable to follow.

Such being the relations of mother and daughter, Frau Bonngart did well not to subject this nascent attachment to the coarse and dangerous ordeal of words. A few prudential phrases might, and at one time would, so thoroughly have disgusted Louise, that, instead of looking on Arthur as a demi-god to be worshipped, she might have come to regard him, like all her former suitors, as a

mere flesh-and-blood agency for supplying her with a house and provisions. Such was her mother's view of a husband—a view supported, indeed, by many wise and prudent authorities—but such was not the view of Louise. Once possessed of that idea, she would have regarded Arthur with disgust, and Cupid would have been constrained once more to evacuate her heart.

Thus the mother and daughter had kept silence by mutual consent, but each perfectly understood the attitude of the other. Hence it was that Louise, although shocked and indignant at the ill-omened hints in her mother's letter, had not been surprised to receive them from that quarter. Hence it was, too, that Frau Bonngart, although wholly ignorant of that parting interview between Arthur and Louise in the little study, yet thought it judicious to watch the conduct of the former very narrowly during her daughter's absence.

The result of her observations was by no means satisfactory. It seemed almost incredible that any man of Arthur's age and sense should care for the society of the young, ill-behaved, child-like American lady. Yet it

really seemed as if this were the case with Arthur. He had a good deal of natural self-restraint and reserve, and, at the present time, was exerting his will very positively in order that no indication of his attachment should escape him ; but Frau Bonngart's eye was a gimlet, that bored even through the *robur et æs triplex*, with which he fancied he had fortified his heart. Do what he might, his eye sparkled whenever Florence entered the room, and never did a sparkle escape Frau Bonngart. He could not avoid provoking Florence to conversation in English, in defiance of the rules of the establishment, and, though the worthy Frau understood only the merest fragments of their talk, and, indeed, judged entirely of Florence's conversational abilities by her few well-worn German phrases, (for as yet the latter had been too short a time in Bonn to speak the language with anything like fluency), yet she did not fail to notice how Arthur seemed to hang on the young American's lips. Again, the lessons which the one gave the other were absurdly and unnecessarily long—so much so, that the Frau would often sneeringly remark that Miss

Lovell had time to forget at the end what she had learnt at the beginning. Or she would vary the taunt by saying, that the longer her lessons, the less German did Miss Lovell seem to know.

It is true that the Frau did not take much by these remarks. They only caused her to be regarded as a cross-grained old woman, without diminishing the lessons by a second, or advancing the cause of Louise by a hairs-breadth. And no one was better aware of this fact than Frau Bonngart herself. But then, if cunning was her *forte*, irritability was her failing. The greatest geniuses have always some weak point lest they should soar too high above ordinary humanity. The good Homer nods—even Achilles was vulnerable at the heel—and Frau Bonngart had a decided weakness in the tongue.

It took the good lady some days to believe that Arthur had so far forgotten himself as to have the slightest *penchant* for the young American. It seemed, on the face of it, so absurd, and so little to be expected, after what she had noticed with respect to him and Louise. But at last she

was convinced. She could not outrage her own shrewdness any longer by refusing to recognize the fact. The extent of the calamity it was more difficult to determine. It might be that Mr. Vaughan was only consoling himself for the absence of Louise with the next best substitute he could find ; it might be that he was simply a confirmed flirt, in spite of his grave appearance, and cared not a "flock of wool" for either. Anyhow, something should be done—and that speedily—to stop the scandal.

But what? The return of Louise might put everything right again; the faithless swain might renew his allegiance, and bind his fetters all the tighter on himself to mark his contrition. What a thousand pities it was that she should be away; and yet, until her aunt mended—or, better still, died respectably and speedily, and thus cut the Gordian knot—it seemed impossible for her to return. Unfortunately Theresa could not supply her place with her aunt, first, because Theresa would absolutely refuse to go, and secondly, because Frau Schönbrunn had conceived a special dislike to her on the first occasion of

their meeting. Frau Bonngart could not go herself, neither did her sister want her; the latter had sent for Louise because she required a young, good-natured girl to wait on her, who would not interfere with her domestic arrangements as an older person might have done. To recall Louise, or to permit her to return, would be simply equivalent to giving up all chance of the very comfortable fortune that must come to them if Frau Schönbrunn received no cause of offence. This catastrophe was not to be thought of. Even Frau Bonngart shuddered at the dimmest anticipation of so great a calamity, and her husband would have raved outright had the suggestion been presented to his mind. In most things the Herr was subject to his wife, but even her influence was impotent when his pocket was threatened.

For the same reason it was almost equally impossible to get rid of Florence. She paid remarkably, extravagantly well. Herr Bonngart's terms were very elastic. With a poor man at a slack time, they could, like the *genie* in the Arabian Nights, contract into the narrowest dimensions, in which case he trusted for his

profits to *extras*, which, under his fostering care, thrived with surprising quickness and regularity. With a rich man, on the contrary, the Herr could be magnificent in his demands. Then the *genie* touched the clouds. In fact, the worthy *Hausvater* had studied, with some success in monetary matters, the art of being all things to all men, and to Mr. Lovell he had been a very imperial thing indeed.

For herself, Frau Bonngart would have been perhaps content to make even the sacrifice that Florence's departure would have entailed, if only she could have been certain of securing her object thereby; but this was, after all, dubious. Perhaps nothing would come of this affair between her daughter and Mr. Vaughan, and, if so, how foolish to throw away a substantial sum of money for the sake of an unsubstantial expectation. Besides, could she hope to gain the consent of her lord and master to this piece of thriftlessness?

One other consideration suggested itself to her mind. Was it not possible that, if Florence went, Mr. Vaughan might go also?

It was certainly possible. The English were ever capricious, and then all chance of the match she was aiming to bring about would be at an end, and they would have lost more than half their income to boot.

The more Frau Bonngart pondered in the solitude of her chamber, the more convinced did she become that there was but one possible way out of the dilemma. Some one must be set to engage the affections of Florence. It did not promise to be a very difficult task. As yet she did not seem to be at all smitten with Mr. Vaughan, as indeed, with such a disparity of age between them, it was not likely she should be. The only question was, who should bell the cat, and here a yet more brilliant idea came to Frau Bonngart's aid. Why shouldn't it be Theodore? Why shouldn't the American's money, as well as the Englishman's, be secured for the family? It was a magnificent idea thus to bring good out of evil—to shape a misfortune into a triumph. It was a combination worthy of a Richelieu or a Talleyrand.

Almost at the moment that this bright inspiration occurred to her, Theodore entered

the room. Frau Bonngart hailed the event as an omen of the happiest augury. She looked up kindly at her son. The wounds on his face had healed, and left much slighter scars than might have been expected, inasmuch as he had attended to them most carefully, and had even given up drinking for a time, instead, like most German students, of doing his best to keep them open, and increasing the local inflammation by even deeper than ordinary potations. It could not be denied that Theodore looked extremely handsome, more so even than before the duel, for his unwonted abstemiousness since that occurrence had given a sharper and more intelligent expression to his face. The scheming mother could not but think that such a son had every chance in his favour, if he would only lay himself out to besiege the young American's heart. She longed to begin unfolding her plans, but it was evident that Theodore had come on some business, and she thought it well to let him commence the conversation. She was not prepared, however, for the opportune assistance that this business gave to her plans.

"Mother," he said, dashing at once abruptly *in medias res*, "can you give me some money?"

"Money! Theodore. What can you want with more money?" answered Frau Bonngart, who was much too diplomatic to give a direct answer.

"I want it very badly indeed," continued Theodore, "and you know it's no use to ask the father."

"The amount of money you spend, Theodore, is frightful!" exclaimed Frau Bonngart, still undecided what to do, but dimly foreseeing that this impecuniosity of her son might be turned to good account in the furtherance of her schemes.

"I get very little, I know," answered Theodore sulkily.

"Very little! Why the father gives you ten thalers a month, and you've no expenses."

"No expenses! I have to get my clothes, beer, tobacco, and amusements out of it, besides subscriptions, and I don't know what besides. It can't be done, it positively can't be done," continued Theodore in an aggrieved tone.

"You can leave off beer and tobacco," said his mother, severely. "I'm sure you would be much better without either of them."

"I should simply die," answered Theodore plaintively. "But really, mother, I never wanted money so much as now—can't you lend me some?"

"What do you mean by lending? Can you ever return it?"

"I might," answered Theodore, with a magnificent trust in the El Dorado of the Future.

"And you might *not*! But what do you want the money for?"

"O, lots of things," replied Theodore vaguely, for his debts were seldom of a nature to bear exact investigation.

"You want it for something special, I am sure," said his mother, who was too sharp not to perceive that there was a secret somewhere, and too persevering not to hunt it down.

Theodore was very reluctant to tell his mother. At last, however, the murder came out. He had lost what was for him a large sum at play, and had no means whatever of

paying it. His mother was really shocked at the intelligence. Though by no means a pious, she was a strict-minded woman, and she reckoned gambling one of the seven deadly sins. At the same time it did not escape her that the occurrence might be turned to good account.

“You will bring down your parents’ grey hairs in sorrow to the grave, if you go on in this way,” she said mournfully. “I would not have the father know it for any consideration.” (This was thrown in so as to retain Theodore entirely in her own power.) “I don’t know what he mightn’t do. And the worst of it is, I really have no money to lend you. I only get just enough for the house-keeping. And yet the debt must be paid. What is to be done?”

This the crafty lady said merely to give the idea of spontaneousness and freshness to the plan she was about to broach. She remained apparently in deep thought for some moments, and then resumed :

“Theodore, you are growing up now, and, with your expensive ideas of living, it really behoves you to think about your future.

What would you do if anything were to happen to your father?"

"I suppose I needn't do anything then," answered the young scapegrace in a matter-of-fact way.

"You were never more mistaken in your life," said Frau Bonngart solemnly. "You would have to work hard for a living. Part of your father's income is an annuity, and another part goes to his first wife's relations at his death, and whatever is left will be divided amongst your sisters and me."

Theodore looked rather blank at this announcement, which did credit to the inventive powers of Frau Bonngart. She would evidently have done well as an *improvisatrice*. Theodore hated work. It did indeed behove him to provide for the future. The only question was, *how*? He could not dig, and to beg he was, if not ashamed, at least equally unsuited.

"What would you recommend me to do, mother?" he asked submissively.

"I wonder you do not guess," she answered smiling. "You should marry, and marry a lady with money."

"I'd do it directly," exclaimed Theodore, his face brightening at the thought of this easy and passive way of earning an income, "but whom can I get? I know so few ladies with money—and those I do know are so old and ugly."

"You know one at least that is neither old nor ugly."

"Who?" asked Theodore, all eagerness.

"Miss Lovell!"

"But she is an American," said Theodore, into whose calculations only Germans had entered.

"What of that? She is very rich, agreeable and pretty," answered Frau Bonngart, who on any other occasion would have allowed Florence the possession of only the first of these attributes.

"That is true, she is pretty," said Theodore musingly, "and I own I rather like her."

"And just the right age for you. She is eighteen and you nineteen."

"But I can't speak enough English for her," suggested Theodore diffidently.

"That is of no consequence. She speaks German well enough now" (it required an

effort for Frau Bonngart to contradict her oft-repeated assertions to the contrary, but she was equal to the occasion), "and besides, as the poet says, 'love needs no words.'"

It sounded as strange to hear Frau Bonngart—hard, practical, 'smoke-dried and seared' as she was—repeating poetry, as it must be to hear a certain anonymous gentleman quoting Scripture. But, like all Germans, she knew a few poetic scraps, and could and did bring them forward upon occasion.

Theodore mused over the proposition just made. The more he thought of it, the better he liked it. The only question was, how far it might be feasible. Frau Bonngart fancied he might be still hesitating on account of his limited acquaintance with the American tongue, and, to re-assure him, added a prose anecdote to her poetic sentiment.

"I knew a lady once," she said—(probably a purely apocryphal one)—"who married a Frenchman, without being able to speak a word of his language beyond the monosyllable '*oui*.' And the odd part of it was, that he knew no German."

"How on earth did they manage?"

“He was a very clever draughtsman, and she a good musician, and in this way they communicated their ideas. He would draw a dove, or a heart, or some other sentimental emblem, and then she would go to the piano and play an equally sentimental air.”

“But how did he make his proposal?”

“Well, he was obliged to have a German lesson for that—only one, however, I believe. He stuck a bit of paper inside his hat, with the words, ‘*Wollen Sie mich haben, Fräulein?*’—(‘Will you have me, miss?’)—and, thus equipped, made his offer. The lady had her ‘oui’ ready, and in this way all was managed satisfactorily. And a very happy match it proved.”

“Well, I’m not quite so badly off for English as all that,” said Theodore. “No, I don’t think there’ll be much difficulty, after all, in that way.”

“In what other way, then?”

“Well, don’t you think, mother, that Miss Lovell is a little smitten with Mr. Vaughan? They are almost always together.”

“Nonsense! Smitten with Mr. Vaughan!—a man old enough to be her father.”

"Perhaps it's he, then, that's smitten with her."

"Not a bit of it. But if he were, that needn't interfere with you. It would be all the more glory to cut him out."

"Very true. And I should like to mortify him, above everything. He's such a disagreeable, conceited old *Naseweis* (prig). I quite hate him."

This feeling was no doubt genuine. Arthur had never taken kindly to Theodore, deeming him a coarse and ungentlemanly sensualist, and Theodore had noticed and returned his dislike, with a considerable amount of interest. Since his duel, too, he had hated Arthur all the more, as being a friend of Lessing, though he was not aware that Arthur had been present on that memorable occasion, as the latter had, at Lessing's particular request, and also out of consideration to Theodore, never referred to the occurrence, and Theodore had been too much occupied and distracted during the duel itself to notice who constituted the crowd of spectators that surrounded him.

Frau Bonngart noted with much satisfaction

the tone of her son's mind. Her plan seemed prospering notably. Inclined to do all she could to assist him in his present strait, she said—

“And now about this money you owe. How much is it, and when must it be paid?”

“It is thirty thalers, and ought to be paid to-day,” answered Theodore, with Spartan brevity.

“Well,” said his mother, “I can't possibly lend you that sum, for I haven't got it, and don't know how to get it. But I will lend you ten thalers, and you can pay these at once, and get your creditor to take your written promise to pay the rest—or I daresay he will want more if he waits—in two months. By that time, if you play your cards well, you ought to have plenty of money at your command.”

This arrangement was by no means altogether satisfactory to Theodore, but it seemed the most feasible that presented itself. He thanked his mother both for her money and her advice, and proceeded at once to carry out the first part of the proposed plan. He succeeded so far, that his creditor allowed the

remainder of the debt to stand over for two months, on condition that he should then receive thirty thalers instead of twenty. Had this been the full extent of Theodore's liabilities, he might, no doubt, have raised the requisite funds without having recourse to matrimony, but in reality he was in debt in many other directions, and was in daily dread that his father might discover the fact. It was incumbent on him, therefore, to commence his suit without delay, and to press it forward as rapidly as possible.

Besides, he had already a liking for Florence, and a very marked hatred of Arthur. Here were levers enough in all conscience to urge him onward—at least, so Frau Bonngart thought, as she sat, spider-like, in her room and wove the web of domestic strategy.

CHAPTER XI.

A PEEP INTO A YOUNG HEART.

THERE were at least two other persons besides his wife in Herr Bonngart's household who had begun to suspect a possible attachment between Arthur and Florence. Certainly the worthy Herr himself was not one of them. In such matters he was stupidly unobservant. Besides, he was out a great deal during the day, he was generally at his club of an evening, and thus he was not in the way of coming upon any traces of mischief even had these been more palpable than in fact they were. The Herr, indeed, lived one of those selfish, monotonously careless, and respectably useless lives, which elderly people are not averse from leading in all countries, but especially perhaps in Germany. From one year's end

to another he never thought of any one but himself. Every action of his life had one aim, and that was his own comfort. Human existence, with all its rights and privileges, was concentrated and focussed in his own "*Ich*," and all other human beings were by nature the slaves and servitors of this quintessential entity. His own family meant those who had a prior claim to wait upon him. It is true that this theory, never expressed in words, but always reigning as the first of major-premisses—the most incontrovertible of *archæ*—in the Herr's mind, had never been accepted by his wife. But even she, with all her sharpness and all her influence over her husband, was forced at times to feel its effects. Had his selfishness been a matter of deliberate purpose with the Herr, there is no doubt he would have shrunk from irritating his wife by its exhibition. But it was not with him purpose, but nature—at least, of the secondary order. He could not help being selfish. Egoism was engrained in his soul: may be said, in fact, almost to have constituted it. He wist not that he *was* selfish. He wist only that he wanted

this, that, or the other, and that, of course, he must have it. Perhaps, if a more friendly view were taken, it might simply be said that he suffered in point of morality from a kind of unnatural and morbid luminousness of mental vision. He saw always, straight from his wish to its accomplishment, unhindered by any intermediate steps. He did not trouble himself about the "how." In his eyes the end obscured the means with its blaze of dazzling desirability. The only misfortune was, that these means must be provided somehow, and the providing thereof commonly cost those who stood nearest to the Herr in blood or friendship no small trouble and annoyance.

Thus with respect to his breakfast. It suited the Herr to rise a little before the lark, though what he wanted with so long a day no one could have guessed, seeing that it was spent entirely in that "busy idleness," that Athenian-like continuity of news-seeking, which other folk would have found more fatiguing than any amount of ordinary labour. But then the Herr, besides being exceeding selfish, was overweeningly conceited. He

fancied that Bonn could not exist a day without him : nay, that the sun himself might miss him if he were not up at about the same time as that luminary. This being the case, it followed, as a matter of the simplest course and consequence, that the whole household (Frau Bonngart and the guests excepted) must rise absurdly early also. For how else could the Herr have his breakfast in comfort ? This was the life-important question. The Herr wished to inconvenience nobody. He would not have done an unkind thing to an insect. He desired all men to be happy. But how else *could* he have his breakfast in comfort ? It was not in the nature of things that this should be possible in any other way, and who was the Herr that he should struggle against nature ? Let the household, then, bestir itself betimes.

It was thus with the Herr in all matters. Arrange everything nicely for his comfort alone, flatter his vanity, and above all leave his money undisturbed, and he would be quite amiable and agreeable. And, as his family did all these things, it is not to be wondered at that the Herr possessed the reputation of

being a devoted husband, a good father, a kind neighbour, an intelligent citizen, and, in short, a model man. In fact, few people of his social *status* in Bonn were more respected than Herr Bonngart.

But the same self-absorption, that tended so materially to increase his own comfort, tended also to prevent the Herr from being a very acute observer of the proceedings of others. Thus it came to pass that he of all persons was the one least likely to observe the existence of any nascent attachment between Arthur and Florence.


But there was one member of the household who took too deep an interest in all that concerned the young American, and another who was too intimately concerned, though from an opposite motive, in all that might affect Louise, not to observe closely the relations of Arthur with his young pupil. These persons were, respectively, Aunt Letty and Theresa.

Like most negresses, Aunt Letty, with many failings, was simply and entirely devoted to her young mistress. It is difficult to imagine what she would not have been

prepared to sacrifice for her, if the necessity had arisen—unless, indeed, it were her gaudy style of dress, which was more precious to her than life itself.

Now Aunt Letty could not but disapprove in the strongest way of any intimacy between her young charge and Arthur. In the first place, wasn't the latter a great deal older than Florence? Was he not ugly?—continued the negress, surveying her own mature, ebony charms in her mistress's looking-glass. Was he not poor?—for Aunt Letty had the most imperial ideas on the subject of money. Then, too, was he not an Englishman, and what would "Massa" say to such a state of affairs as the intimacy of his daughter with an Englishman, leaving out of consideration the possible result of the said intimacy?

Altogether the subject occasioned Aunt Letty much annoyance. Not only was she very anxious to save her young mistress from what she deemed a *mésalliance*, but she was also perhaps unduly impressed with a sense of her own responsibility in the matter. Something must be done. What should it be? In her perplexity Aunt Letty blun-



dered upon a course of action, that had a direct tendency to bring about the catastrophe she was so anxious to avert.

At first she did not like to mention her suspicions openly. She fancied that this might suggest to her mistress what perhaps, after all, had never yet occurred to her. She adopted, therefore, a more subtle and, as she thought, more effectual system to avert any impending mischief. She began to speak of Arthur in a slighting and depreciatory way. She often commented upon his age, his ugliness, (as she persisted, rather unjustly, in terming it,) his poverty, and his ill humour. It is to be feared she, at times, added anecdotes to his discredit, told with much verbal and circumstantial minuteness, but without any direct reference to authorities. These authorities, it would seem, she had in each case taken her "Bible-oath" not to reveal; but, had she not been thus hindered in the revelation, they would probably all have been found to answer to the name of "Aunt Letty." With all a negress's obstinacy and assumed stupidity she would try to impress her view of Arthur upon her mistress. She could not

imagine how "Miss Flo" could care to talk with such an uninteresting gentleman. Nothing would ever make her believe that he was clever. No; she was sure of that. Whatever else he might be, he certainly wasn't clever. She couldn't bear her dear "missis" to be so deceived. And certainly he wasn't handsome; his own mother couldn't call him that, if the gentleman had a mother, which Aunt Letty had a mysterious way of doubting. It was a very odd thing, but he sometimes positively squinted. He had squinted at her (Aunt Letty) that very morning on the stairs. And this bad habit would be sure to grow upon him. And then his nose was so thin—

"Really," interposed Florence, laughing, "you shouldn't make such personal remarks, Letty. It is not every one who can be as handsome as you."

The negress looked pleased for the moment, but she felt she had a duty to discharge and went on. Mr. Vaughan might be very amiable, but really she hadn't found him so. He always spoke very crossly to her when "Miss Flo" wasn't near. (This touch was thrown

in that Aunt Letty's experiences might not seem to contradict Florence's; but it had a rather bad effect on Aunt Letty's plan.)

"I wonder why he should act differently when *I* am near," murmured Florence; and something like an expression of pleasure crossed her face.

Aunt Letty saw her mistake in an instant. She hastened to repair it by laying another sin to the charge of poor Arthur. It wasn't for her to say it, but she was afraid Mr. Vaughan was very sly. He could be so nice with people when any of the ladies were by, and so different at other times.

Florence looked disappointed. Mr. Vaughan's conduct, then, did not change specially on her account. Up to this time she had listened very patiently—now she seemed to think she must put a stop to Aunt Letty's scandalous chit-chat.

"Really, Letty," she said, "you go a little too far in your dislike to Mr. Vaughan. I can't imagine what he has done to offend you. Everyone else likes him so much."

Aunt Letty was not going to be put down in this way. She had been Florence's nurse,

and was by no means prepared to admit that the nursery sceptre had fallen from her hand. Besides, now she was something even greater than nurse—she was Florence's guardian. She held herself privileged, therefore, to say what she pleased to her in private.

It was a pity, she continued, that "Miss Flo" could not hear all that she (Aunt Letty) heard. But "Miss Flo" was so kind and charitable she never believed evil of anyone. Aunt Letty, however, had not lived thirty-five years in the world (fifty-three would have been a correcter figure) without knowing that there were some black sheep in it. She only hoped Mr. Vaughan was not one of them. But, after all she had heard in the kitchen and the neighbourhood (for Aunt Letty had picked up quite enough colloquial German to carry on the profession of gossip), she was much afraid—very much afraid indeed——

"Afraid of what?" asked Florence, whose curiosity was roused in spite of herself. "What have you heard?"

But Aunt Letty only shook her head. Head-shaking was one of her accomplish-

ments, and she did it almost as well as the Bishop of British Polynesia.

"What is it, Letty? Pray tell me," continued Florence, with juvenile eagerness.

Aunt Letty was afraid, however, that this was quite impossible. It was not proper to talk of such subjects to young ladies.

"Why did you refer to it, then?" asked Florence, innocently.

"For many reasons," answered Aunt Letty, sententiously, but at the same time feeling not a little embarrassed by the question.

"Well, I don't want to hear any more," said Florence, who knew there was no more likely way of extracting a secret from her old nurse than to appear indifferent about it. "Can't you talk of something else? It seems to me you have never anything to talk about now but Mr. Vaughan. I suppose he has trodden on your favourite corn by accident, and you cannot make up your mind to forgive him."

This time, however, Florence's tactics failed. Aunt Letty could not, on the spur of the moment, invent any libellous story that should equal, in its probable effect, that mys-

terious shake of the head. She judged it, therefore, desirable to leave this to work by itself, and to run no risk of diminishing its horror. It might be well, however, to repeat it, and this she now did with interest. Florence remarked it and said, laughing—

“It’s no use trying to shake your head off, Letty. I know Mr. Vaughan a great deal better than you, and I think him very nice and very good. And now please to brush my hair for me.”

The conversation had taken place in Florence’s room, where she was wont to sit a long time every evening listening to Aunt Letty’s gossip, whilst the latter assisted her at her *toilette de nuit*. Letty commenced brushing the luxuriant silky El Dorado, for one tress of which an ardent lover might have been well content to risk his life. The worthy negress did not at all like the turn the conversation had taken, but she wisely concluded that she had done all she could at the moment, and that the shake of the head required time to produce its full effect.

But with all her cunning and all her inti-

macy with her young mistress, Aunt Letty understood the latter very imperfectly. This course of action might have succeeded very well with some natures ; but it was worse than thrown away upon Florence. She was so much a creature of intuition and instinct that she was not to be talked, or reasoned, or laughed out of her opinions. Of one thing she was quite convinced, and that was that Arthur Vaughan's was a true and noble nature—and of this belief all the Aunt Lettys in the world should never disabuse her. Had she not herself been so true and noble the case might no doubt have been different. For it is ever the mark of an inferior nature to be influenced more by words, opinions, and semblances, than by feelings, consciousness, and fact. Such souls think less of their own felt certainty than of other people's expressed suspicions. They cannot respect one whom the world does not honour, or believe in one whom other men distrust. But with Florence it was altogether different. She recognized no higher ground of belief than her own consciousness. She knew that Arthur was genuine and good—not because other people said so,

and Mrs. Grundy had been pleased to put a ticket of approbation on his back, but because she herself saw and felt that he was so.

For this reason Aunt Letty's machinations were singularly futile. They were even worse than futile, inasmuch as they set Florence meditating more and more on Arthur's good qualities. Besides, she was always constitutionally disposed to take the part of any one whom she conceived to be unjustly maligned, and in this way she was brought into a new kind of mental relation with Arthur—that, namely, of championship. She was always defending and praising him, either orally to Letty, or mentally to herself, and thus she got in time to regard him with even an exaggerated admiration and regard.

All this was very well, as paving the way to something further ; but as yet, even if any germ of future love lay in the heart of Florence, it was only potential and dormant. Even for this Arthur had in some measure to thank Aunt Letty's misguided attempts at depreciation ; but he had ere long to thank her for a yet more notable piece of assistance. It was given on this wise :—

The maligning process had been going on for some time without any success, and Aunt Letty herself was beginning to perceive that it was what Americans call "played-out." Yet, what more to do, she knew not. In fact, at this time there were no less than three people conspiring against Arthur and Florence, whilst they themselves remained all the while sublimely ignorant of any such machinations. The lessons continued as usual, and, far from growing shorter, seemed to lengthen themselves from day to day. Not only so, but, in spite of all Frau Bonngart's diplomacy, and Theodore's attentiveness, and Aunt Letty's openly expressed disgust, the young couple were perpetually together. Whatever more might or might not be hatching, certainly they were very fond of each other's society. Aunt Letty saw she ought to change her tactics, but, with all her ingenuity, she could not devise any other method that promised more success. At last Fate and her own temper (for even good-natured Aunt Letty possessed such a commodity) induced her to adopt one that did

more to forward Arthur's cause than anything that had yet happened.

The scene was again laid in Florence's room. She had passed a less pleasant day than usual. Arthur had been away—a great anomaly with him—dining at the “Silver Moon,” with a friend, and afterwards lionizing him over the place. Florence could not but admit to herself that she had missed him much. A strange, indefinable feeling with respect to him stole over her. She had never known before how much she enjoyed his society, but now, when even for a short time it had failed her, she felt as if there had been a gap in her existence. When he was at home, he threw, she knew not how, a kind of atmosphere of serenity and security and satisfaction over her life. She had, without being herself aware of it, basked in the soulshine of his stronger nature as young plants raise their heads in the sunlight. She had not so much thought of him as felt his strong, yet gentle influence stealing over her.

Of all this, as she now sat in her chair, and Letty operated upon her radiant curls, she

became more and more conscious, and yet even now no thought of love had entered her innocent mind. It might well be that the tinder was awaiting the spark, but, as yet, that spark had not fallen. Strange that the crotchety Fates should have willed that it should fall at last from a woman's hand—*dux femina facti*—and that that woman should have been Aunt Letty! It must have been Dan Cupid himself who devised so poetical a retribution for Aunt Letty's treason against his sovereignty. Anyhow, the limping Nemesis did not belie her Horatian character, but overtook the guilty one at last.

It was not possible for Aunt Letty to remain long silent. For a full five minutes she said nothing, out of respect to the meditative mood of her young mistress. It required a herculean effort, but Aunt Letty, as she was fond of saying, "knew her place," and put thus much restraint upon herself. But more than this neither gods nor men could reasonably expect her to do. Accordingly she now made her way with all speed from the golden into the silvern region.

"Miss Flo, me tink you ain't berry well. You don't hab nuffin to say."

"I expect you to tell me the news, Letty," answered Florence, dreamily.

"Me habben't got no noos—dat is to say, no noos dat Miss Flo would like to heer."

"I should like to hear anything," said Florence.


But Aunt Letty grew again mysterious, averred that she had something to communicate which would make "Miss Flo's" hair stand on end, but declined to say what it was.

"Who's it about?" asked Florence.

"It's about dat Meester Vorn."

"Then I don't want to hear it," exclaimed Florence, passionately. "You are always saying something against him, and I must ask you to discontinue the subject for the future." And so saying, Florence rose indignantly from her chair.

Aunt Letty witnessed this ebullition of feeling with mingled sorrow and astonishment. She could not understand it, as she herself said, "no-how." She was on such confidential terms with her mistress, so thoroughly privileged to say what she liked to her, that this



sudden rebuke—"short, sharp, and decisive" as it was—almost took away her breath. Nothing of the sort had ever before happened in her experience. She had even said much worse things of this very "Meester Vorn," without provoking anything more than a smile of incredulity, or a good-humoured expression of distrust. Whence this sudden change? What should it portend? These were the questions that passed through Aunt Letty's mind, and in a way transpired to her ebony face, where they asserted their existence by the most surprising and ludicrous varieties of expression. The fact was that Aunt Letty had not sufficiently borne in mind that you may take a pitcher to the well ninety-nine times, and it shall yet be broken at the hundredth, or that it is one thing to listen with merely a good-humoured protest to idle gossip, in which you yourself have no particular interest, and quite another to hear a friend aspersed, whose absence you are at the very moment regretting. Altogether, Aunt Letty was for once quite out of her depth, but she had just sufficient presence of mind left to make a bold plunge towards the land

of re-asserted authority. It would never do to let "Miss Flo's" remark pass unnoticed. It would amount to abdication on the part of Aunt Letty. Accordingly she cast about in her mind what might be the most stinging retort, and could think of nothing more effectual than this :—

"Lor', Miss Flo', one would tink you was in lub with Mr. Vorn!"

The moment the words were uttered, Aunt Letty repented of them. They had come to her tongue, prompted by her evil genius himself. However expressive they might be of her own sense of the absurdity of such a contingency—however they might be explained as embodying the *ne plus ultra* of impossibility and ludicrousness—however they might represent the *reductio ad absurdum* of suppositions—it did not fail to strike her, the instant they had escaped her lips, that it was, after all, hardly judicious to put such a suggestion, even in the most ironical form, into her young mistress's mind. But even a worm will turn if you tread upon it, and Aunt Letty had turned at her mistress's rebuke, without much thought beyond that of self-

assertion. Arthur never knew how much he really owed to her unwilling agency.

The immediate effect of the remark was disappointing. Florence remained silent, and Aunt Letty was not quick enough to detect a certain shade of mysterious meaning that flitted instantaneously across the young girl's face. The rest of the toilette operations went with but little attempt at conversation, and Aunt Letty only observed that "Miss Flo'" seemed unusually impatient to get rid of her for the night. Could it be that her young mistress was seriously offended? The thought weighed lead-like on poor Letty's affectionate heart, and before retiring she could not help asking her mistress the question.


"No, not at all, Letty," answered Florence, smiling. "Pray, don't distress yourself about that. It's all right."

Left alone, Florence remained for a long time seated on her *fauteuil* in front of the dressing-table. Wonderfully beautiful and *spirituelle* did she look as she thus sate. Her perfectly-shaped head rested on the back of the chair, in such a way that the face was slightly in-

clined in an upward direction. And an expression peaceful and lovely, as if from some heavenly region, seemed to have descended on its pure and lovely features. The bright lips were slightly open, as though to permit the verbal passage of a sweet and treasured thought. A *robe de chambre* of pale blue merino edged with white threw out into more dazzling relief the brilliancy of her complexion. Peeping from below it were the tips of two fairy feet, which, encased in the tiniest and most perfect of morocco slippers, rested on an embroidered footstool.

What was the young girl thinking of, as she thus sate rapt in reverie? Letty had unwittingly touched a chord in her heart, that needed only a touch to make it vibrate for ever. She did not repeat Letty's words—they were altogether too coarse and audacious—but she kept repeating the thought Letty's words had originated. Strange as it may appear, it was a new thought—quite new—and therefore perhaps all the more delicious.

Florence was not one of those precocious young ladies, who dream of marriage at ten, practise flirtations at eleven, and are almost



aggrieved if they are not led to the altar at fourteen. She had mixed a good deal with gentlemen, and had heard not a little love-talk respecting others, but, such was the child-like simplicity and innocence of her character, that she had never thought of herself as the possible subject of a similar passion. Of what is called love *par excellence* she had had absolutely no personal experience. Else she could not have been so charmingly fresh and frank and confidential as Arthur had always found her. For once touch the heart of a young girl as love touches it, and thenceforth there must ever be a kind of gulf between her and the opposite sex. In some sort she has then been admitted into the innermost sanctuary. The Eleusis of human nature stands open before her. A solemn change has passed over her. A creature of mere life and thought has passed into the higher world of feeling. All existence has been transfigured with a sublime spirituality, which forbids as irreverence any hasty exposure of the heart. Thenceforward self becomes too awful a thing to be lightly or commonly revealed. There must be an assurance

of the fullest sympathy before the task is possible, and this sympathy can only be secured by love. For sex, rightly considered, is no mere stage in growth or caprice of vital force, but something radical, essential, absolute and immutable—a deep distinction of the soul, merely dimly adumbrated in the body—a something which must therefore be as immortal as the soul itself, and must produce eternally the most wondrous psychological effects.

And now this great change was passing over the soul of Florence. The image of Arthur stood before her, with its loving, tender face, and deep, earnest, melancholy eyes ; and in the furthest recesses of her being—hiding itself, as it were, in bashfulness in the dim cavern of wordless, undeveloped thought—sounded a still, small voice, which, inarticulate as it was, yet conveyed to her heart by the meaning of its music this question : “ Did she love Arthur Vaughan ? ” And even thus tenderly and indistinctly questioned, the young girl blushed. Alone though she was, a deeper tint rose to cheek and temple. Thus was the question answered. It was indeed so. All unconscious as she had herself been of the fact up

to the time when Aunt Letty made that fateful remark, she could not but be conscious of it now. The foundations had long since been laid, in Arthur's kindness and gentleness, and cleverness and nobility—perchance also in the sympathetic influence of his strong though hidden love—and now the edifice itself rose free and majestic, as at the touch of a magician's wand.

Again Florence blushed. She kept her eyes fast closed, as though afraid to face the prosaic realities of her chamber. Even before them—the inanimate chairs and tables,—she felt somehow like a guilty thing. An indefinable sensation, half of pleasure, half of shame, possessed her as she pleaded guilty to the accusation of her own heart. It was that mixture of soul-flavours—that mingling of the sweet and the piquant—which is so indescribably delicious to the spiritual palate. She kept the new thought before her, as a mother her first-born babe. She played, she dallied with it, half-bashful, half-delighted. She let her soul wander with timid, hesitating steps in the new Canaan thus suddenly entered. There might it cull the flowers of pure and

fragrant fancy, like a child who gathers roses in some sunbright pleasaunce.

Strangest, most dream-like of all, Florence was not surprised. Perhaps it was that the deliciousness of her discovery had robbed it of any power of creating astonishment. The most wondrous change that can affect a human soul had affected hers, and yet she was not conscious of its strangeness. She was only conscious of its sweetness. Happy they whose joy is so complete that it leaves no hole or corner for wonderment to creep in at !

And yet there was nothing ecstatic in Florence's joy. Hers was not one of those fiery natures, in which the physical overpowers the spiritual element. What she felt was more a serene ripple of enjoyment, as when, in midst of summer heat, one laves oneself in cool, grateful waters. Not unaccompanied, it is true, by a quickened motion of the heart, and a breathing less soft and regular than her wont. But yet having the body in such subordination to the soul as hardly to be a physical emotion at all.

Anon, when this first question, so injudiciously propounded by Aunt Letty, had been

answered wordlessly in the affirmative, another, almost equally important, suggested itself. Did Arthur love her? Who should answer this? Rapidly did Florence run over in her mind all Arthur's doings and sayings since she had first known him till the present time, not omitting his sudden faintness during their moonlight ramble, but, when all was done, she could not lay any unction of certainty to her soul. When all the materials for forming a judgment had been duly enclosed in her retort, and the fire of her ardent wish applied thereto, there precipitated itself at the end only an unsatisfactory and ambiguous "perhaps." For, however well Love may interpret the Present, he is not by any means equally good at deciphering the Past. So this question was forced to remain unanswered, in spite of all Florence's efforts to "come into the clear" respecting it.

Thus for more than an hour did the young girl sit in dreamy, delicious reverie. Then, hastily extinguishing the light without opening her eyes, she crept to bed, taking her thought-treasure with her. Nor was the God of Dreams unmindful of this the fairest of

his subjects. At his bidding the gate of horn revolved upon its hinges, and forth into the maiden's mind came trooping the true and beauteous dreams. Meanwhile the soft reflection of her joy lay on her fair young face like moonlight on a meadow.

CHAPTER XII.

AN OLD FRIEND.

TRUE love in a young heart is a tenant allodial rather than feodal—very hard indeed to eject, and as much unlike those “tenants at will”—flirtations—as “a hawk is from a hernshaw.” Certainly Theodore’s task was now immeasurably more difficult than it had been when first undertaken. Frau Bonngart might plot and scheme, Aunt Letty might grumble and backbite, and Theodore himself might lie in wait for his prey with the most patient and praiseworthy assiduity, but a wise man would have backed Arthur by heavy odds against the three. At the same time, it cannot be denied that Theodore, duly impressed with the importance of

the work, played his part with a skill and perseverance hardly to have been expected from his antecedents. He was, no doubt, assisted not a little in this by his own growing (and, as far as it went, genuine) attachment to the fair American. He could not appreciate the wonderful freshness and vivacity of her intellect, but he was much attracted by her personal and external graces. And, so ennobling is the influence of genuine love even in its meanest form, that Theodore certainly became himself more and more attractive from day to day. He gave up, for the time being, the society of his boon companions, as feeling dimly that they were unfit and incongruous associates for one in his present frame of mind. Their conversation now seemed even to him coarse and foolish, their habits brutal, and their life grovelling. He wondered how he should ever have cared for such society and such amusements.

In this *bouleversement* of the mind, Theodore gave up all deep potations. He had even some thought of becoming a teetotaller. He smoked but rarely, and moderately. He

aimed in all ways at leading a kind of model life, partly, no doubt, the better to attain his end, but partly, also, because his own sense of the "eternal fitness of things" counselled such a course. Above all, he devoted himself to Florence, not only with an ardour, but (which was less to be expected) with a considerateness, that might perhaps have had some chance of success had her heart not already been garrisoned by an inexpugnable attachment. For Theodore, after all, was not naturally base and brutal. That there was a full and potent animality in his constitution, could not be denied, but there was also intellect, and, at bottom, some fund of good feeling. His was just one of those natures that may develop into almost anything, according to the circumstances of their position, and the guidance to which they are subjected. And Theodore had originally fallen into bad hands, and, in consequence, his lower nature had, as it were, come prominently to the surface. But deep in his heart's recesses there lurked in him, as in most men, a sufficient potentiality of virtue. Only it needed to be evoked.

Another consequence of Theodore's altered conduct was that his *physique* gained wonderfully in strength and beauty. The always handsome, but formerly pale and haggard-looking, *roué* grew more and more from day to day into a model of healthy, graceful manhood.

Well might Frau Bonngart become more certain of the success of her scheme as she noted this change in her son's habits and appearance. The only probable obstacle to success seemed removed. It was hard to fancy that such a young Apollo should sue in vain for the heart of any maiden. And with no rival but a pale, melancholy-looking man of thirty, Theodore's chances might indeed seem overwhelmingly favourable. But, alas ! it needed not Burns to tell the world that "the best-laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft a-gley."

Circumstances, too, seemed just at this juncture to favour Theodore's suit. For two or three days Arthur was obliged to be out a good deal with his friend of the "Silver Moon." These golden opportunities Theodore did his best to utilize.

He sat much with Florence, talking to her in easy German, with a tact and consideration which the young lady did not fail to notice, and which tended not a little to improve her opinion of Herr Bonngart's son. He even offered to give her a lesson, but this Florence was determined not to permit, lest it should seem like disloyalty to Arthur, but at the same time she thought it very considerate and unselfish of Theodore to have made the offer. Altogether, the latter fancied he was making great progress, and he certainly did accomplish much in the way of removing any disagreeable impression respecting him which Florence might have formed.

They were sitting together alone in the garden in this way one afternoon, when the little gate was suddenly opened, and Arthur entered. His countenance fell as he saw the pair sitting, as it seemed, in such confidential intercourse.

He had already begun to suspect that there might be more between Florence and Theodore than was yet acknowledged, and the present scene tended to confirm these suspi-

cions. With his innate delicacy of sentiment he felt, however, that he had no right to interrupt the pair, and, passing swiftly and almost noiselessly by, he essayed to enter the house unobserved.

In this, however, he was foiled ; Florence's quick ear, which had perhaps been on the *qui-vive* for his approach, caught his footstep, and, turning round, she saw him in the act of entering the house. It was her turn now to feel disappointed. Why should Arthur seek to avoid her ? It seemed only too clear he could care no whit about her. Acting on the impulse of the moment, she exclaimed—

“Why don't you come here, Mr. Vaughan, and give an account of your conduct ? What has made you so shy the last few days ?”

Arthur's foot was on the threshold, but he turned back at once and went towards the speaker. Taking off his hat with rather a formal politeness, he said :

“Forgive me for any apparent rudeness or neglect, Miss Lovell. I have been very much occupied with my friend.”

"But at least you can spare us five minutes."

"Fifty, if you are so flattering as to require them."

"O, I daresay we shall grow tired of each other long ere then," answered Florence, laughing, "but meanwhile sit down and tell us what you have been doing."

Theodore did not much approve of this interruption, but making a virtue of necessity he offered Arthur a place on the bench, taking care, however, himself to remain nearest to Florence, who was seated at one end.

"Really I've no news," said Arthur. "A friend of mine named Granton has been staying, as you know, at the 'Silver Moon,' and I have had to be with him a good deal. But he is leaving to-morrow."

"So even you have some friends," exclaimed Florence, archly. "I almost began to think you were superior to such weaknesses."

"Why?"

"Because you never seem to seek them out, or talk of them, or write to them."

"You forget Mr. Lessing."

"He is the exception that proves the rule."

" 'Happy the man who is sure he has one true friend,' says the adage."

"But the adage don't say he wouldn't be happier if he had several."

"Naturally not. It only points at the impossibility."

"Then you think it is impossible to have many friends?"

"I certainly do not think the human heart is capable of indefinite subdivision, and I am quite sure that, the more friends, the smaller portion of affection must each be content with. I doubt if a man can have more than one real friend."

They had been talking in German, and Theodore said now :

"What you say, Herr Forn, seems to apply to love rather than to friendship."

"They are the same things," replied Arthur. "Love — unselfish love — cannot vary in kind, only in degree. Love is no more than the highest, noblest, most perfect, and most sublimated form of friendship, and

friendship is only a weaker preparation of the same divine elixir."

"I do not agree with you," said Florence, "about friendship not being possible with more than one. It seems to me that, the more friends you have, the greater and stronger becomes your power of friendship."

"Has any one more than one heart, and can he give less than the whole of it to a friend?"

"I am sure even the most unselfish always retain a good slice of it themselves," answered Florence.

"Then he is no friend in my sense of the word."

"It seems to me you take a very transcendental view of friendship," said Florence in English, for she did not know the German for "transcendental."

Theodore noticed that the foreigners had glided into their own language, and suspected it might be in order to exclude him from the conversation. He wronged them greatly, but the suspicion did not tend to restore the equanimity that Arthur's arrival had disturbed.

"You are right, Miss Lovell," answered Arthur. "I do take a very transcendental view of friendship, as of most other things. I am an admirer of human nature, and I cannot bear beliefs which rob it of its glory."

"Well, for my part, I like everybody—that is almost everybody," said Florence, very naïvely.

"But friendship, as I remember saying once before, is surely something more than 'liking.' 'Liking' is a kind of good-natured approbation of a dog, a picture, a *ragoût*. Friendship is the prodigal outpouring of oneself into the depths of a kindred soul."

All this was dangerous talk, and Theodore had not been far wrong when he had said that Arthur's "Friendship" might more properly be translated "Love." It was this perhaps that made the conversation so interesting to Arthur and Florence. They were really discussing the subject nearest to their own hearts, and comparing notes respecting it, under the flimsy cloke of a less awkward name. What wonder that they should have forgotten poor Theodore, and added another

to the many examples of the inconsiderateness of love ?

“ And have you ever met with such friendship as you speak of ? ” asked Florence, with unusual timidity, and half-blushing as she spoke.

Arthur looked at her sharply for a moment, and then said, whilst a strange melancholy expression flitted across his face :

“ I once fancied so, but I was wrong. Have you ? ”

Florence had not expected this retaliatory question. It embarrassed, whilst it pleased her. It was pleasant to hear that Arthur’s heart was still free, but it was awkward to have to talk about her own, even under the respectable disguise of friendship. But Florence had not a particle of feminine *finesse* in her nature—it never occurred to her to evade a question—so, after a little pause, she said frankly :

“ As you ask me, I cannot say I ever have.”

It was now Arthur’s turn to experience a thrill of pleasure. He could not help it, as he thus heard from her own lips that Florence’s

affections had never yet been engaged ; but at the same time he kept blaming himself for being interested in such a question. What difference did it, or could it, make to him ? And yet he felt it made a very great difference indeed.

They had now reached a point in the conversation when any further questioning might have proved embarrassing to both. Florence bethought herself how it might be changed. It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good, and so Theodore discovered in this instance. Florence made a remark in German, and endeavoured to entice him again into the talk. Theodore, though a little sulky at having been left out of it so long, was only too glad of the opportunity, and the trio might have chatted amicably and ordinarily enough for some time longer, had they not been interrupted by a new arrival.

This was Herr Bonngart, who, still looking flushed and sleepy from a prolonged *siesta*, came towards them, preceding a stranger. Herr Bonngart prided himself much upon his courtly manners, but at the present moment they did not shew to advantage. It might

have been that the worthy Herr was hardly yet awake, or that his over-anxiety to do honour to his guest imparted an unusual grotesqueness to his demeanour. Certain it was that his gait was singularly unsteady and crab-like, and that there was a total absence of *hausväterliche* dignity in his deportment. He held his hat in his hand, and kept "louting low" to his visitor, at times essaying the courtier's feat of walking backwards before him, and otherwise lavishing upon him every sign of distinction which the German burgher is capable of bestowing. In the hand that was not occupied in holding his hat, he brandished what was apparently the visitor's card, and during the entire transit from the back door to the spot where Florence and her admirers were sitting, he kept pouring into the stranger's ear disconnected phrases respecting "the honour of the visit," and, so forth, with an English word every now and then thrown in by one of those severe mental efforts of which Herr Bonngart was on great occasions capable. It is true that these English words were chosen without much reference to their sense, *mais, que voulez-vous?*—if the moral excellence

of a thing consists in its motive, Herr Bonngart's English was of the most unimpeachable description.

At this unwonted spectacle Florence, who had never before seen the old gentleman quite so demonstrative, could hardly forbear laughing. Theodore, too, looked on with some astonishment, but knew enough of his father's character to understand that the visitor must be some personage of distinction. As to Arthur, he recognized the new-comer at once, and started up to meet him.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I'm delighted to see you again. So you've not gone to the Drachenfels. Miss Lovell, allow me to introduce to you Lord Charles Granton. Lord Charles Granton, Mr. Theodore Bonngart. Pray take my seat. I'll fetch some chairs and we'll have a cozy chat together."

But Herr Bonngart could not think of allowing the friend of an English "meelor" to carry a chair into the garden. Arthur had risen many degrees in his estimation since the advent of this illustrious visitor, and the Herr was determined to show that he had a due knowledge and appreciation of the distinctions

of society. Accordingly he insisted on fetching the chair himself, and placing it with much ceremony, before the new-comer. At the same time he brought one for himself, that he might have the advantage of hearing this distinguished personage speak, albeit in a tongue which he (Herr Bonngart) could not understand.

For the moment Florence felt a little embarrassed. She had heard much of English noblemen, of their wealth, their haughtiness, and their grandeur, and the actual presence of such a magnate was so new an experience to her that it prevented her from feeling quite at her ease. To her surprise, however, she found that this *enfant terrible* was not so very terrible after all. He was simply a fresh-looking, handsome young man, some two or three years younger than Arthur, with short, crisp chesnut curls, and clear, good-humoured eyes. *Au reste*, he was becomingly, if not very elegantly, dressed in a kind of tourist-suit, and wore remarkably thick, serviceable boots. Florence noticed also that his hands were small and white. His manner was frank and genial, and, altogether, Florence could not but acknowledge

that she found him much more agreeable, if much less imposing, than she had expected an English nobleman to be. But then, she had hardly grasped the distinction between elder and younger sons. Lord Charles Granton's brother, the Earl of Granton (this is, as all the world knows, the second title of the Dolldrummond family, *vide* Debrett), was heir to forty thousand rich English acres, and could afford therefore to give himself airs. But Lord Charles had no acres at all, and only a very modest annual allowance. It behoved him, therefore, to make himself agreeable.

Arthur repeated the Drachenfels question, which had got swamped in the ceremony of introduction.

"The fact is," said Lord Charles, "I have just received a telegram, which has altered my plans. An aunt from whom I have expectations is very ill, and I must start for England in about an hour, so I thought I would come and wish you good-bye first. Can't you come with me?"

"Impossible, my dear fellow," answered Arthur, who of late had felt the impossibility of leaving Bonn very strongly indeed.

"We shall meet, however, again, before long, I hope."

"Mr. Vaughan seems a model of industry, Miss Lovell," said Lord Charles, turning to the young American, and smiling in a way that revealed two rows of dazzlingly white teeth.

"He was, until you came, my lord," answered Florence, who was not so rabid a republican as Lessing, and could frame her lips to pronounce a title, "but since then he has been sadly idle."

"It is high time I went then," said Lord Charles. "It is strange how I always do have a demoralizing effect. The charms of my society seem fatally fascinating."

And the young man laughed so pleasantly that Florence began to think that what he said in jest might not improbably be the simple truth.

"Have you seen all the sights of Bonn," she asked, "that you leave it so soon? It is hardly respectful to so celebrated a place."

"Yes; everything—Churches, not worth seeing—Art Museum, dear at ten groschen—Universitätsgebäude, about a quarter the size

of one college at Oxford—the Allée, a squire's avenue—last, but not least, the interior of the 'Silver Moon,' which may be described as one of the most ingenious modern inventions I have yet seen for extracting money from travellers. It is like that magnetic mountain in the 'Arabian Nights,' which drew all the nails out of any ship that incautiously approached too near. Just in the same way this hotel draws all the gold out of anyone's pocket, who is reckless enough to enter, and then the poor wretch goes to wreck and ruin."

"I hope that is not your case, my lord."

"I hardly know. My wings I am sure will be scorched, but I myself may perhaps yet escape, 'so as by fire'—by the 'skin of my teeth,' as it were. I am sure all the rest of me will be flayed. However, I can always have recourse to my millionaire friend, Lovell—I mean Vaughan," he added, hastily correcting himself.

Florence stared, thinking Lord Charles must have suddenly lost his wits not to remember his friend's name more accurately. And to confuse it with hers too!

"Well, I can recommend Mr. Vaughan as a money-lender," she said archly.

"A doubtful compliment," interposed Arthur. "Miss Lovell means, Granton," he continued, "that I do not charge more than sixty per cent."

"I have paid as much as that before now," said his lordship, "when you and I were together at Christ Church, Vaughan."

"I doubt if you ever paid it," answered Arthur, maliciously; "but it may have been paid in your name."

"No; I paid most of it myself beforehand. You know how those things are done, Miss Lovell, or, at any rate, no doubt this gentleman (Theodore) does. You borrow a hundred pounds—"

"How many dollars is that?" asked Florence.

"Five hundred," replied Arthur.

"—You borrow a hundred pounds," repeated his lordship. "For that you get forty pounds down, three meerschaum pipes, two walking-sticks, a small assortment of plated goods—very thinly plated indeed—and a pair of ground glass decanters. At the end

of three months the hundred pounds—I beg your pardon, the five hundred dollars—has to be paid in full, with sixty pounds for interest, or to be renewed for another three months at not more than cent. per cent. That is what a young gentleman has to go through in England, Miss Lovell, when he wants a little money. No doubt you manage these things better in America.”

“I really don’t know,” said Florence, laughing. “I only hope they are not the terms on which Mr. Vaughan loans money.”

“Take care, Miss Lovell,” exclaimed Arthur, “or you will provoke me to make you a present of the sum.”

“Personally, I should have no objection to those terms,” said Lord Charles, dryly.

“I should,” said Florence. “So few people can be trusted to make a good use of the power which an obligation conferred gives them.”

“Thank you for the compliment, Miss Lovell,” returned Arthur, laughing.

“It was a general, not a personal, remark,” said Florence; “but if the cap fits, it would be a pity not to wear it.”

After a little further desultory conversation, Lord Charles rose to take leave. Herr Bonngart had remained all this while in respectful silence, like a "groom-in-waiting." He now thought it necessary to come more prominently forward.

"Meelor'," he said, commencing his speech with this one word of quasi-English, and then plunging at once into his own beloved gutturals—"Meelor', I hope your lordship will do me the honour of partaking of some refreshment before you leave my roof. I assure your lordship I should esteem it a great privilege."

Lord Charles had travelled a great deal in Germany—that is to say, he had passed from one Hôtel d'Angleterre to another. The consequence was that he had been in as fair a way of learning the language of the country as were Miss Ross's pupils under that excellent lady's system of collecting together a school composed almost exclusively of English girls. As a further consequence, his lordship failed utterly to make out Herr Bonngart's meaning. He turned to Arthur for help.

“Herr Bonngart asks you if you will not take some refreshment before you go.”

“A thousand thanks!” exclaimed Lord Charles, trusting to the abundance of his pantomime to make Herr Bonngart understand him. “A thousand thanks! It is very kind of you, I’m sure; but really I’m afraid I’ve no time, and, besides, I have only just lunched. Thank you very much.”

With this answer Herr Bonngart was forced to rest content. It was a disappointment, but disappointments, like accidents, must occur sometimes in the best regulated families. And it was some consolation to reflect that, even though the refreshment scheme had failed, the great fact remained, and would always shine with lustre in the archives of his family, that an English “meelor” had paid a visit to his house. Of this glory no combination of the Fates could now rob him. And, fortified by this reflection, he accompanied his illustrious guest to the door, with a regret which he was able to conceal, to some extent, under an appearance of equanimity. Had he been aware that the whole annual income of

“meelor’ ” was something under five hundred pounds a year, he might perhaps have been less profuse in his marks of respect. In his own mind he had, from the first, settled it at fifty thousand. Could everybody know everything, would anybody act as he does? This is verily a question involving a deeper philosophy than its form would lead us to expect. Who shall answer it?

Again the train bore Lord Charles away from his friend in the character of an unsuccessful plenipotentiary. In vain had he plied Arthur with all manner of cogent arguments in order to induce the latter to consent to propose some compromise to Miss Claxton. Though Granton’s advice was now reinforced incalculably by Arthur’s attachment to Florence, it was not yet strong enough to overthrow his deep-rooted sense of the obligation of his solemn promise and pledge. The sacrifice seemed more awful than ever, but he was not the less resolved to make it. “*Fais ce que tu dois, advienne qui pourra,*” was still his motto.

It had not escaped Granton’s sharp obser-

vation that there was more between his friend and Florence Lovell than the former had been willing to acknowledge.

"I should not be surprised if you were to marry *la belle Américaine*," he had said, half jestingly. And Arthur had replied, with all his old firmness and sadness—

"Never!"

CHAPTER XIII.

PART OF A LETTER.

IT has been said in a previous chapter that Theresa Bonngart had been no unobservant or uninterested spectator of what had been going forward in the household since the departure of Louise. Theresa was naturally sharp, and, as in these days of her departed beauty and old-maidish hopelessness she lived less like her father for her own gratification than for the purpose of annoying other people, she cultivated sharpness as a kind of professional accomplishment. It was part of the stock-in-trade with which she negotiated for the unhappiness of the human race in general, and—must it be added?—for that of her half-sister in particular.

From the first Theresa had been on the look-out for an attachment between Arthur and Louise, and it had not been long before she had come to the conclusion that, whatever might be the Englishman's feelings in the matter, those of her sister were of an indubitably tender description. Of course Louise had not taken Theresa into her confidence. On the contrary, she had done all in her power to throw dust into her eyes. But with one so sharp-sighted as Theresa this course of action had only tended to the confirmation of her suspicions, until at last she had become morally certain that Louise was in love with Arthur, and that there was at least a possibility that this affection was returned.

The discovery was intensely disagreeable to Theresa. In the first place she hated her sister, and the idea of her happiness was as bitter to her as gall or wormwood. And then, secondly, she had long been determined that, if she could prevent it, Louise should never marry. If the elder sister must die an old maid, there would be some comfort in having

the younger as a companion in this misfortune.

Accordingly, for some time before the sudden departure of Louise from home, Theresa had been cudgeling her brain to construct some mine that should blow into impossibility the fortress of her sister's hopes. This had not, however, been so easy to accomplish as she had anticipated, more especially as any attachment between Arthur and Louise, however certain it might be in point of fact, was as yet a matter which had not been officially divulged by either, and could not therefore be openly asserted.

Such being the state of affairs, it may readily be imagined how great was Theresa's satisfaction when she began to detect signs of what she could not but fancy a dawning affection springing up between Arthur and Florence. It caused her the same sort of pure, unmixed joy as a tyrant feels when he hears that an enemy, who has escaped from his dungeon, and thus eluded the despot's ingenious tortures, has been thrown from his horse, or has otherwise met with the fate

of him "whom vengeance suffereth not to live."

To foment and develope this attachment was now Theresa's object. And thus it came to pass that, in one and the same household, there was the father stolidly and selfishly indifferent, whilst the eldest daughter was anxiously scheming to effect that which the mother and son were labouring with equal assiduity to counteract. Meanwhile two of those principally concerned remained in happy ignorance of the meshes that were weaving around them. But with the third—Louise—it was not so. Even if Frau Bonngart had not already tortured her heart with vague indications of the turn things were taking, she might have been sure that her sister would not long allow her to remain in any uncertainty respecting such a matter. An opportunity of discharging an envenomed shaft into the bosom of a rival Theresa was never likely to neglect.

Accordingly, the day after Lord Charles's visit, Theresa betook herself to her own room, in order to distil her gall and transfer it to

paper with the greater comfort and effect. As a matter of course, the letter was couched in the most affectionate strain. It is almost a radical peculiarity of the feminine mind that it can, without a twinge of remorse, prostitute the phrases of affection to the service of the most malevolent passions. Almost equally as a matter of course the letter did not busy itself primarily and principally with the matter which caused it to be written. This would have belied the tortuousness of a woman's nature, which, even when it sees no obstacles to the attainment of its end, yet prefers for its own satisfaction to attain it in a crooked and round-about way. Hence the saying, that has almost passed into a proverb, that you must look for the real gist of a lady's letter in her postscript.

In the present instance Theresa began with the words, "My dearest little sister," and ended, "with love and kisses innumerable;" but the letter contained one paragraph, which, slipped in *par parenthèse*, was yet calculated to cause the most consummate agony of mind to poor Louise. It ran thus :

“There is very little news here. We go on in much the old style of routine, except indeed that Mr. Vaughan seems to pay more attention than he used to Florence. Sometimes I almost think that there must be something between them. The lessons that he gives her grow longer every day—at this moment they have been more than an hour *tête-à-tête* in the study—and they are almost always together at other times. The other day they went for a walk alone, I don’t know where.” (This was when Arthur and Florence had gone to buy the present for Louise.) “Perhaps, however, I am too suspicious, but the mother and Aunt Letty seem to fancy the same thing, so it looks as if there must be something in it. How does it strike you? And would such a match be desirable? I confess Mr. Vaughan seems a little too old for Florence, but she doesn’t seem to mind that, so I don’t see why other people should object. I can conceive no other obstacle, as both, I believe, are rich. However, *nous verrons*. I only tell you this, knowing you like to hear any little gossip of the kind, and especially now when you are so far away. For myself,

I look upon the thing as settled, but you must not breathe a word about it, as nothing has yet been said. I suppose you would be one of the bridesmaids, unless, indeed, Florence should be afraid of your eclipsing the bride."

It was a bitter, cruel letter, all the more cruel for being written in such an apparently affectionate strain. It was like those poisoned sugar-plums which the Marquise de Brinvilliers used to distribute amongst her hospital patients, with this distinction, that the Marquise was merely engaged in a scientific experiment, whilst Theresa was gratifying a personal *animus*. Her thin lips curled into an involuntary sardonic smile, as she read and re-read this malevolent production.

"That will do," she murmured, with a crafty, feline purr of satisfaction; "that will do. I fancy Louise won't sleep very soundly the night she gets that. The touch about the bridesmaid is a masterpiece."

So saying, Theresa folded the letter and took it herself to the post. She would not

run the slightest risk of accident to such a precious instrument of vexation.

This done, Theresa felt a sort of vicious parody of the sensation that a good man experiences when he has performed some kind and charitable action. A glow of satanic satisfaction came over her, and, for the rest of the day, she was in unusually good spirits, chuckling at intervals to herself at the thought of the effect her missive would produce. She felt, too, as if she had now a weight off her mind. For some days past she had been meaning to write this letter, and had craftily postponed doing so until she was quite sure that, under no circumstances, could it hasten the return of Louise. That would have been a great blow to her plans, but on this head she had sounded both her father and mother, and had found them equally determined that on no account should Louise leave her aunt until the latter were either better or dead. This ascertained, Theresa delayed no longer to write and dispatch the document.

Its effect upon Louise was even greater than her sister had anticipated. Even Theresa might have been more than satisfied with her

work could she have seen its consequences. The poor girl was sitting, in what was now her usual melancholy frame of mind, by the window of her room when the letter was delivered to her. She tore it open eagerly, hoping that her sister might mention Arthur amongst the other members of the household. She glanced hastily over the first few paragraphs, without meeting the beloved name. At last it caught her eye, and she began reading the paragraph which contained it. As she read, her face grew deadly pale, she gasped for breath, and, when the cruel words were ended, she uttered a piercing shriek. The letter fell from her grasp, she pressed her hand upon her heart, and fell fainting on the floor.

The cry was heard by Justine, and that rough but faithful domestic came rushing into the room. She too gave a cry hardly less piercing when she saw Louise prostrate. Then, having thus rendered her tribute to the etiquette of such scenes, she proceeded to busy herself with the practical work of restoration. It took some time, however, to recover Louise. When at last the

latter opened her eyes, she looked round bewildered, and then, closing them again, said faintly and sadly :

“ I had hoped I was dead.”

“ Not so bad as all that, Fräulein,” replied Justine, cheerily. “ You’ll be all right again now in a few minutes. Take some cognac.”


And, without more ceremony, Justine forced a little brandy-and-water between the reluctant lips of Louise. This revived the latter, and in a few minutes she sat up and began to collect her thoughts.

“ What was it ?” asked Justine, thinking that Louise was now sufficiently recovered to give an explanation of the mystery, and that her own attentions deserved some reward in the way of gratified curiosity.

“ O, nothing—nothing,” said Louise—“ a sudden spasm, that’s all.”

“ Very sudden indeed,” replied Justine, glancing suspiciously at the letter that still lay open on the floor.

Louise followed the direction of the glance, and stooping down suddenly, picked up the document. Then she said—



"Thank you so much, Justine, for your kindness. I don't know what might not have happened if you hadn't come to my help."

"Do you often have these 'spasms?'" asked Justine, gruffly.

"Not very often. I suppose I have been living, as the doctor says, too low. He is always talking to me about it."

"This sort of living don't suit us young people so well as it do the missis," remarked Justine, grimly. She might have been only fifty, but probably was some years older. Still, age after all is so purely relative, that, compared with her mistress, Justine was perhaps entitled to call herself juvenile.

"I think I shall do very well now, Justine," said Louise, forcing a smile. "I shall lie down a bit and try to get some sleep."

"Very well, Fräulein; I shall be near, and you've only got to call, if you want anything. Won't you have something to eat first?" she added, as usual not without half an eye to her own interests.

"No, thank you; a little sleep will do everything for me."

Justine left the room, and Louise, in a kind of dim conscientious compliance with the letter of her statement, threw herself for a moment upon the bed. But she could not remain there. In another moment she was pacing wildly up and down the room.

A torrent of bitter thoughts swept over her like the waters of Marah. First, the crushing nature of the blow itself. There could be no uncertainty now as to what the hints in her mother's last letter pointed. The two letters confirmed each other in such a way that there was no longer left any colourable pretext for doubt. Not but what, in the midst of her suffering, Louise gave even more than its full weight to the fact that her sister hated her. Had the letter come alone, unsupported by Arthur's silence and her mother's mysterious hints, she might have attributed its ill-omened news to Theresa's inventive malevolence. But as things were, this theory was quite untenable.

That there was some deep mystery in the matter, was only too evident. And it was quite beyond the power of Louise to unravel. That the young American had taken advantage of

her absence to ingratiate herself with Arthur seemed clear enough, and Louise heaped curses (for her nature had now been dipped in the petrifying well of disappointment and suffering) upon her innocent head. But how account for the sudden change in Arthur's sentiments? He had certainly loved her when she left, for his own lips had told her so. And yet he had never given any sign or token of it since. His passion seemed to have vanished as suddenly and silently as the morning dew. It was passing strange.

The more she pondered this, the more did a sterner spirit creep over the girl's mind. The events of the last few weeks had already worked a marvellous alteration in the tone of her thought and feeling. Since the receipt of her mother's letter she had been a different being. She was no longer the timid girl, leaning upon others for advice and support—she had been thrown rudely on her own resources, and had found them—at least, if not her own, such as the devil is always ready to provide. Even her journey—the first long one she had ever made alone—had done somewhat towards creating in her an independent

and self-reliant feeling. The lonely life in that empty house—the attendance upon her helpless aunt, who relied on her almost entirely, except in what related to expenditure, had done more. But, above all, the mental throes she had undergone in consequence of Arthur's silence and her mother's letter, had made her not only independent, but had given her a feeling of outraged loneliness, which had quickly developed into a kind of savage self-reliance and self-assertion.

And now, in Theresa's letter, the last stroke had fallen. If anything more had been wanted to complete the change in her nature, this had supplied it. She had passed through the utmost travail-pangs of feeling, and could now steel her heart against the future. No worse thing could happen to her. She was in a state to meditate on revenge. She had indeed conceived sorrow, what wonder, then, if she should bring forth ungodliness? Is not this too often the history of the origin of sin?

That she had been cruelly wronged and injured by some one, seemed "clear as Holy Writ." By whom? By Arthur, most cer-

tainly, but not by Arthur alone. Even in her present state of mind she could make excuses for him. He had been seduced from the path of duty and original inclination by the machinations of her sister and the wiles of that American Delilah.

As she thus thought, it suddenly occurred to her—Was it, after all, certain that Arthur had betrayed her? Was it not possible that his letters had been intercepted by Theresa? Her instinctive knowledge of her sister's character forbade her to doubt that she was quite capable of such an act. It might indeed be so, and the thought sent a ray of hope into her heart. And yet she was forced to allow it was not probable. Had one letter been intercepted, it would have been difficult to intercept a second, for she knew that Arthur generally posted his letters himself. Besides, if he had been really anxious to hear from her, he would have taken special pains that they should not miscarry. He might even have come to see her. Englishmen and Americans, she knew, did not make much ado about what a German thinks a long journey.

In any case, some one was deeply, damnably to blame. If Arthur were not, then it was Theresa or Florence. Perhaps it was all three. Yet Louise clung to the faint hope that Arthur might still prove faithful.

One thing was more than ever certain. She must return home, and that at once. She must see for herself how matters stood. She could bear this agony of suspense no longer. It would drive her mad if continued. *She must return.*

But how? Over and over again she cursed, with white, trembling lips, the fate that had driven her from home at the very moment of attained happiness. More vehemently still did she curse the inexorable necessity that lay upon her to remain at Würzburg. She could see positively no escape from her position. Her aunt was no better — perhaps even a little worse. If, under these circumstances, she ventured to return home, nothing would be gained. Her father, in his anger, would simply drive her from his door. She knew him well enough to be aware that he was not to be trifled with where money was concerned. She could not write to Arthur. That were

too great a depth of degradation. No formal betrothal had ever taken place. He might disavow the facts of their last interview, and laugh her to scorn.

It was a prospect black with despair. She felt crushed beneath a sky of lead. In vain she writhed her tormented soul hither and thither, if haply she might find some outlet for escape. But in vain. All seemed closed in with a harsh, rugged impossibility. Such was the unnatural tension of her mind that she felt capable of doing or suffering anything to gain her end, if only she knew what. She was maddened, desperate at her wrongs and at the apparent impossibility of redress.

It was while she was in this mental fever, pacing the room with eyes that glared tiger-like with ferocity and the hunger of revenge, that she heard a knock at the door. In these days she possessed more than a woman's cunning. The necessities of her position had developed much evil that had heretofore been latent in her nature. In a moment, by a gigantic effort, she folded up her excitement and laid it for the while aside. It would never do to be seen in her present state.

With a voice which was only peculiar for its forced, unnatural calmness, she bade the visitor enter. It proved to be Justine.

“If you please, Fräulein,” said the latter, with unwonted courtesy of address, “the doctor is downstairs and wants to speak to you.”

With the same mechanical composure Louise rose from her seat and descended the stairs. It required a mighty effort to restrain herself, but of mighty efforts the once weak girl was now capable. She had laid the *Ætna* of her will upon the *Enceladus* of her passion, and it was too soon as yet for the buried giant to burst forth in flame and fire. She entered the one sitting-room that, since her arrival, had been made to assume something like a habitable appearance. There the doctor was awaiting her. He rose at her entrance, and did what a German doctor does not do so readily as his English brother—he shook hands with her. He felt for the poor lonely girl, and meant thus to show his sympathy. As her hand rested for the moment in his, he did not fail to notice, with professional quickness, that

it was icy cold. And yet the girl's face was flushed.

"I am afraid you are not very well, Fräulein," he said, gently.

"There is not much the matter, thank you, Herr Doctor," answered Louise, forcing a smile. "I have been a little giddy this afternoon."

The doctor was sure there had been something more than this, but he thought it best not to press his inquiries. He would ask Justine privately what was the matter.

"And how is the gracious Frau?" he inquired.

"Much the same, I fancy," said Louise; "she doesn't seem to make any great progress."

"I'm afraid she never will," remarked the doctor: "I fear she is beyond the power of medicine. However, I have brought the new drug I spoke of. I will give it to you, and explain about it after I have seen your aunt."

"Would you like to go up now?"


The doctor signified his assent. Louise

went upstairs to see whether her aunt could receive him, and returned almost immediately with the request that he would walk up. Louise led the way, her heart still beating wildly, but her demeanour more composed than ever.

Frau Schönbrunn lay in bed in the attitude in which Louise had first seen her. She looked, however, thinner and paler, and spoke with greater effort. Her small, ferrety eyes, too, glittered with a more unearthly brightness. One skinny arm, terminating in what seemed more like a claw than a hand—so wasted was it, and so long and pointed the nails—lay outside the coverlet. She moved her head slightly as the doctor entered, and returned his salutation in a faint but grating voice.

“And how are we to-day?” asked the doctor, with much professional suavity, as he proceeded to seat himself by the side of the patient’s bed.

“No better, Herr Doctor,” answered Frau Schönbrunn, almost indignantly. The tone conveyed the impression that she thought it



too bad she should be paying money to the doctor without receiving any equivalent in restored health. And no doubt this reflection did prey upon the old lady's mind. The doctor, however, had far too much professional experience to care for a patient's humours, either expressed in words or latent in the tone of voice. He answered softly, without one touch of remorse at his own falsehood, for he saw that the old lady was certainly worse—

“I think we are a little better—a very little. We seem able to talk well. How is our appetite?”

“Enormous!” answered the patient, recoiling with horror at the thought of her own extravagance. “I sometimes think it must be a symptom of my complaint, and yet I fancy my niece and Justine eat even more than I do. I hope they're not ill,” added the old lady, sardonically. “Perhaps it's something in the air of the house.”

The doctor well knew, that for years past Frau Schönbrunn had been systematically starving herself. He answered, however, very simply—

"I was just telling Fräulein Bonngart I was afraid she was not very well."

"Stuff and nonsense! She's well enough," exclaimed the old lady, who foresaw in this remark a possible addition to the doctor's bill, and did not mind stultifying herself to avoid such a calamity. "But she neglects me very much," she added, peevishly.

Louise had sat up with her aunt the greater part of the preceding night, and was really exhausted with her continuous nursing. But she did not protest against the remark. She noticed it only by a strange, hard smile and a bright, steely glitter of the eye. Almost immediately afterwards, she quitted the room and left the doctor to pursue his diagnosis alone, saying that he would find her in the room below.

It was not long before he descended. Louise was expecting him with a restless impatience, which evinced itself, however, only by a nervous twitching of the mouth and hands.

"What do you think of her state?" she asked, the instant he appeared.

"Almost, or quite, hopeless," answered the

doctor, "but not one of immediate danger."

"You mean she may live for some days yet?"

"Some weeks," replied the doctor, wondering at the question. "She has extraordinary vitality, and with care may last, as I say, for weeks."

Could it be that the face of Louise fell at these words? The doctor almost thought so. He drew a phial from his pocket.

"This, *Fräulein*, is the medicine of which I was speaking. I put it in your hands because it requires the greatest care in using. You will see that it is in a graduated bottle. One of the divisions is to be taken for each dose, once a day. You will see the directions on the bottle. It is very important that the dose should be given exactly. Too little would not have the desired effect, and an overdose might — and, in your aunt's weakened state, probably would — produce death."

Again the strange, steely glitter came into the eyes of Louise. "I will be very careful," she answered.

"We must do all we can to prolong life," added the doctor, gravely; "but in this case I fear there is very little hope."

"Certainly," repeated Louise, mechanically; "we must do all we can to prolong life. O, yes; certainly."

Her manner was so odd that the doctor again looked sharply at her.

"I am sure you are ill," he said. "Pray let me prescribe for you."


"No, thank you," replied Louise, recovering herself; "it is only a headache, which I shall sleep off."

"You do too much," continued the doctor: "you should have a nurse to help you—the one I recommended."

"If I should be poorly to-morrow, I will," answered Louise; "but I am generally so well that it really is not necessary."

"You had better let me send her to-night."

"Pray don't," exclaimed Louise, eagerly; "strangers always make me feel uncomfortable," she added, as if in explanation.




Finding his offers unavailing, the doctor at last took his leave, promising to call again the next day, and Louise withdrew to her own room.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LETTER'S CONSEQUENCES.


THERE is no stranger psychological problem than the genesis of crime. To account for it you have to choose between two main theories. Either some men are born into the world with souls specially warped and crooked, just as some men are born lame or deformed, or all are born alike with the same potentiality of wickedness inherent in them, and this potentiality depends for its development simply and entirely upon the circumstances in which the particular soul is placed. And there can be no doubt that this latter theory, as it is in itself the more plausible, so does it commend itself better to the facts of human experience. Given a sufficient motive, and the man of the



world always expects a crime as the result, except when this is hindered by unusual integrity of principle, or by the counteracting force of a dread of punishment. Nay, more, this theory commends itself also to the individual consciousness. There is no man, at all accustomed to the task of self-examination and mental analysis, who has not felt in himself a vague, infinite possibility of sin,—who has not shuddered as he has stood on the brink of his own heart, and looked down awe-struck into those dim depths, unfathomed even by himself; where, as in the slime of Chaos, lurks a monstrous, undeveloped brood of evil thoughts and embryo crimes, which need only the hot sun of risen passion to warm them into a loathsome vitality and vastness. No man who has once so looked will ever dare to thank God that he is not as other men. For he will feel and know that in essentials he *is* as other men—that in all humanity there dwells the same tremendous capacity of evil, and that he alone is wise who, like the publican in the parable, recognizes the fact, and stands humbly and prayerfully on his guard against his own

nature. Rejuvenate the ermined judge, place him shoeless, breadless, in St. Giles', and the time will soon come when he shall need an ermined official to judge him, with all the solemn pomp and circumstance, wherewith men strive to exalt into a false splendour and dignity the necessary, but after all selfish, protection of their own interests. No child of Adam can really afford to wag the head of pitying superiority. Sin is the common birth-right of all, and if it lies in germ in some, and springs to fuller existence in others, what then? It is a hard matter for the weed to help growing when the sun of opportunity and necessity strikes straight rays upon it. Let us, then, at least be humble and honest, if the exigencies of society will not permit us to be merciful.

Up to the present time Louise had been no worse and no better than most girls of her age. Three weeks ago she would have shrunk from committing a crime, as a child starts back from a risen adder. No temptation to do so had occurred to her: no necessity had arisen. Now, however, it was different, and straightway in the hidden depths of the girl's



heart there uncoiled itself a ghastly monster, the hideous offspring of necessity and opportunity. It might have been strangled in the birth, but Louise had not strangled it, and now it dominated her soul. Her bitter sorrows and her direful exigencies had generated a sternness, an inflexibility, and a stony hardihood, which did not recoil at the appearance of even this awful shape.

She sat with locked door in her room. In her hand she held the phial the doctor had given her. In her soul there rung with hollow echo the words :

"An overdose might and probably would kill."

An overdose ! How easily an accident might happen. How often such accidents *did* happen. A certain number, no doubt, every year, and no one a bit the wiser. And yet what a lucky accident this overdose would be for her. How it might alter her whole future, enabling her, as it would, to return home at once, and to see how the things that concerned her peace really stood. She might yet arrive in time to reclaim her loved one, or at least to frustrate the schemes of those

who were so basely plotting against her. Yes, an overdose would indeed be a most lucky accident for her.

Louise started suddenly at her own thoughts. She was so little used to entertain such ghastly visitants, that, with all her determination, they could not but strike a cold shudder into her heart. Yet, though she was startled, she felt no remorse, no pity, no shameful consciousness of guilt. Her wrongs had eaten the core out of her conscience, and left in its place only the deceptive husk of a cold, calculating policy. For the time, at least, she was hard and unyielding as stone. She was superior to all feminine weakness. She felt she could be strong as a lion, and pitiless as a tigress.

And then the devil wove his usual web of sophistry in her breast. Her aunt must die—there was no doubt of that. She might as well die a few days earlier as a few days later. It could make but little difference to her. But what a world of difference it might make to Louise. Besides, the old woman could have no enjoyment in life. On the contrary, existence must to her be mere pain and weariness.

ness. Did not doctors sometimes mercifully abridge the lives of incurable and agonized patients? Was it not still the custom in certain countries to smother the sufferers from hydrophobia? And what, after all, was death? Who could dare to say it was a calamity? Had she not herself this very afternoon longed to die, and should she not long for it with a tenfold longing, if her worst prognostications should prove correct?

No feeling of personal affection asserted itself in opposition to these thoughts. Louise had not, could not have, any attachment to her aunt. The old lady had been, in her experience of her, invariably sly, mean, peevish and inconsiderate. Yet, on the other hand, no taint of personal dislike infected the motive that was rapidly driving Louise to a desperate resolution. There was but one motive, and that was, as she phrased it, the inexorable necessity of her own circumstances. She *must* go home at once—if in another way, good—if not, then over the dead body of her aunt. *Quocunque modo rem.*

And she had already seen there was, there

could be, no other way. Then must the "accident" happen.

Again and again did Louise rack her fevered brain to devise some other plan. She had absolutely no desire to do, *per se*, the crime for which she yet stood prepared. On the contrary, she would have joyfully welcomed an escape from it. But she was now at bay against what she fancied a banded world. If there were no side-leap, by which she might escape, then was she ready to do and dare the worst. And if a chance obstacle came in her way, down it must go. It was sad to trample the life out of anyone, but that was the fault of those who had thus brought her to bay. Who was she that she should struggle against the grim necessity of her lot? She was no Ajax to defy the lightning.

Every moment it became more and more evident to her that the "accident" must happen. But how? Should she give Justine the phial, and make some mistake in the directions? That was scarce possible, for the directions were printed outside, and Justine could read. Besides, the bottle was marked

into divisions, and Justine would naturally give only one. No. If she made up her mind to the crime, it behoved her to see that it was effectually accomplished. She must do it herself, cost what it might. And, in her present state of preternatural excitement and determination, she felt that it would not cost her more than she could undergo.

She must do it. That was now certain. But how and when? She examined closely the phial. It contained a pure, colourless liquid, like water. Her course was easy, She would administer three doses—would three be enough?—and then fill up the bottle with water, until it should seem as if only one dose had been taken. This would make no alteration in the appearance of the mixture, and, without a careful analysis, it would be impossible to detect that any trick had been played. Even then, who should say that the doctor had not made a mistake in the strength of the preparation?

The “how” seemed easy. Now for the “when.” The label of the bottle described it as a preparation of *nux vomica*, to be taken

once in the twenty-four hours, at bed-time. When should Louise give it? Time was everything to her. She would administer it that night, and, if possible, leave the next day.

All this did Louise go over and over again, in her own mind, for hours after the doctor's departure. Then she descended to supper, looking in upon her aunt by the way, and wondering, with a strange, irrepressible wonder, what the old lady would have said, had she known what was in store for her. As it was, Frau Schönbrunn only muttered in her usual aggrieved tone :

"I wish you wouldn't desert me in this way. I've hardly seen you all day."

"I'm going to sit up with you to-night, aunt," answered Louise, in a hollow voice.

"I should hope so," croaked the old lady, without a sign of gratitude. "And where are you going now?" she asked, as she saw Louise preparing to leave the room.

"I am going to supper."

"Supper! supper!" groaned Frau Schönbrunn. "I declare it's always some meal with you. If it isn't one, it's another. It's a

disease, a positive disease—I'm sure of it—this inordinate appetite.”

“Shall I put myself under the doctor's care for it?” asked Louise, with grim humour.

“No! no!” exclaimed the Frau, with all her remaining strength. “I shall be ruined as it is by that impostor's bill; and the fellow does me no good. I might just as well have kept my money in my pocket.”

Louise knew, as a matter of fact, that none of it had yet passed out of that receptacle, or was likely to do so, as long as the old lady lived. She made, however, no reply, and regretted having pained her aunt by introducing the subject of the doctor. It was unfortunately necessary to sacrifice Frau Schönbrunn's life, but to hurt her feelings was a wanton and unjustifiable injury, which Louise had not wished to commit.

Down-stairs she found Justine, who was waiting for her by the table, on which the meagre supper was already spread.

“I hope you are better now?” said Justine.

“Quite well again, thank you. It was merely a passing attack.” And Louise smiled

—rather formally, it is true—and tried to look her best, to deceive Justine. The latter, however, said :

“I hope you’ll let me sit up with the missis, to-night. You will tire yourself to death, Fräulein.”

“I can do it very well,” answered Louise. “But we can share the labour,” she added, with a half-shudder at the probable ghastliness of the night. “I must sit up with her for the first part, as I have to give her her medicine at eleven ; but, perhaps, after that, you could come. It is only seven now, so you could get a few hours’ sleep first.”

“I’ll do it gladly, Fräulein ; and I only hope you’ll sleep soundly when your turn comes.”

“Sleep soundly !” Louise smiled a sickly smile. Would she ever sleep soundly again after that night ? No matter : she must obey the Parcæ, even if she provoked the Erinnyes.

Soon after she returned to her aunt’s room, whilst Justine went to bed. Her aunt grumbled at her for having been away so long, and again averred that she was being ruined. Was it

possible that Louise had been all that time at supper ?

As a matter of fact, Louise had hardly been able to force down a mouthful, though, for the sake of Justine, she had made a show of eating. However, she did not defend herself, but tried to soothe and pacify her aunt. At last she succeeded, and a silence set in between them.

It was now quite dusk, but somehow Louise did not care to face her aunt's dumb, yet sharp, inquisitive investigation. She could not bear that small, bright eye fixed constantly upon her. Why was it that it caused her such uneasiness ? She felt she could have answered the question, but she did not. Yet it kept echoing and re-echoing in the waste places of her soul.

She moved her chair behind the one curtain, which had been put up between the bed and the door to shelter her aunt from the draught. There she sat for a long, weary time, until entire darkness had set in. The darkness and the silence oppressed her painfully. She was not in a mood to care for much solitary meditation. A deed had to be

done, and the less thought respecting it, both before and after its execution, the better for the peace of mind of Louise.

She did not dare to propose having a light, though she would have given much for the material cheerfulness that this would have shed around her in her mental excitement and misery. It was only when absolutely necessary that her aunt would consent to having a candle. It was, she said, such reckless and useless extravagance.

Neither did Louise care to commence a conversation. The hypocrisy of tender inquiries, or even of mere friendly talk, between her aunt and herself, shocked her in the relations in which her resolution had placed them. She would not be more wicked than she could help. She would not add one grain of unnecessary deceit to necessary—what?

Again Louise shrank for an instant appalled from the brink of the abyss by which she was standing. It was, however, but for an instant. She put her hand instinctively into her pocket, and felt the fatal letter. The contact strengthened her to crime as the touch of earth did Antæus to valour.

The next instant she felt the fateful phial. There it was, safe in her pocket—that little yet all-powerful solvent of her perplexities. When should she administer the medicine? The sooner the better now, but how soon? In half-an-hour, or five minutes, or at once? Not at once, certainly. She must brace up her resolution still firmer. And yet it must be done—she did not dream of relenting. Only not that moment. When then?

At the instant the loud-voiced clock of a neighbouring church struck solemnly the hour of ten. Each stroke fell like a cold, icy hammer upon the girl's heart. It seemed to be a last inarticulate voice lifted up to deter her from her crime. Alas! as so often happens, it only tended to hasten its accomplishment. The clock had struck ten. When it should strike half-past, Louise swore to herself she would give the medicine.

With all her firmness, she felt it to be an awful half-hour. She could hear each pulsation of her heart. Sitting in that deep darkness by the side of her unconscious victim, she became aware that her mind had acquired an unnatural quickness and hideous brilliancy

of imagination. Do what she might, she could not help projecting the most ghastly images upon the field of the circumjacent gloom. She closed her eyes. The images were still there, grim, terrible, inexorable. She could not see her aunt for the darkness, but she pictured her to herself, both as she then was and as she soon would be. This last was an awful picture. Louise shuddered as she mentally surveyed it, yet was she not the less determined that what she had resolved on must and should take place. She was now too desperate and devilish for aught to hinder its accomplishment.

Meanwhile Frau Schönbrunn lay still—very still indeed. Only by her breathing was Louise made aware of her proximity. What was the old woman thinking of in that her last hour? Did the nearness of her doom and the presence of her destroyer awake no dim presentiment of evil in her bosom? Did her good angel whisper no subtle warning in her soul's ear? In spite of herself, Louise could not help speculating with a ghastly interest, how this might be. She would fain have done something to give her aunt a hint of what was impending,

but how could she, without betraying her plan ? She could only hope that some process of preparation for her impending doom was going on in her aunt's mind, as she lay there so dumb and motionless.

And yet it seemed to her, with her religious education, very horrible—more horrible than the crime itself—that a soul should be sent forth of the world “unhouselled, disappointed, unaneled.” About her own death she cared nothing. She expected perdition. In her present frame of mind she felt that perdition would be more congenial to her than salvation. For the devil had indeed entered her heart. But for her aunt to die with no spiritual aid or solace seemed hard and shocking.

Suddenly it occurred to her she would offer to read some prayers to her victim. She gave a great gulp at the thought of such awful profanity and sacrilege. And yet it seemed better and kinder than that her aunt should die without any religious offices. But she would not do it at once. She would wait till the last moment.

The clock struck the quarter. There was

yet another quarter of an hour—fifteen awful minutes—between her and her crime. She felt that it was almost impossible to bear them, and yet still more impossible to accelerate the event. Each second seemed to burn itself into her heart. There was one strange, perverted thought which consoled her somewhat. As far as regarded herself—her own future—her own state—the deed was already done. She had already performed it in thought and purpose. Nothing could henceforth erase the stain of blood from the texture of her soul.

Still her aunt spoke not, moved not. It was horrible this silence and darkness. How much longer could she bear it? She prayed a devil's prayer that it might end, but at the next moment longed earnestly for its continuance. There was yet the last awful plunge to make into the chill, hopeless waters of committed crime, and from this she shrank back in fleshly weakness.

It came at last—that other clanging sound from the church tower, which bade the demon in Louise equip himself for his deed of darkness. As the stern notes came reverberating through the air, Louise shook like an aspen-

leaf. Her knees trembled beneath her, as if burdened beyond endurance by the weight of her guilt. She rose from her chair. Without asking permission of her aunt, she proceeded to strike a light. She had expected that this would be the signal for an interruption on the part of the latter, and that thus the ghastly wordlessness of her present situation would be ended. For herself, she felt for the moment unable to be the first to break the silence. As a ghost from the charnel-house of intended evil, she seemed to need, ghost-like, to be challenged ere she could speak.

There came, however, no sound from the patient's bed ; even the breathing appeared to have ceased. It struck Louise as strange. Shading the light with her hand, from a sort of instinctive carefulness, she turned towards her aunt. The latter lay quite motionless, and, so pale and rigid did she look, that for the moment Louise fancied she was dead. Could it indeed be so ? Had the fate of nature forestalled the fate of crime ? Louise bent down over her and listened for her breathing. Was it audible ? Her own heart beat so

loudly, that at first she could not be certain. Yes!—no!—yes!—there was no doubt—the old woman was still alive. The crime needed doing after all, and Louise must nerve herself to do it.

And yet for one moment, as she gazed upon her slumbering aunt, the girl felt unnerved. Even the aged and the sick look so innocent and trustful in their sleep. Had it been necessary to kill her there and then, Louise felt she could not have done it; it would have been too great an outrage upon nature. But it was not necessary. On the contrary, it was necessary to wake her ere the medicine could be administered.

Softly and stealthily, with light still shaded, did Louise creep to the table. There, standing with her back to the bed, she took the phial from her pocket, and held it for a moment in her trembling hand; then she poured into a glass the proper dose. Here she stopped; for the instant she could not get further. That little glass ridge in the phial was the very boundary line between innocence and crime. Seldom had it been so accurately, so positively, so materially defined.

He who should cross that Rubicon must be for evermore a traitor to virtue.

It was an awful moment. For the last, last time did her good angel—her better self—plead with Louise. For one brief “eye-glance” did she recoil from the abyss ; then, with a stern spiritual determination, but an uncontrollable fleshly weakness, she closed her eyes—it was a kind of craven attempt at an impossible self-delusion—and poured some more of the liquid into the glass. She opened her eyes—there it was, more than a second dose. She had not measured it ; her hand had trembled. It had fallen out more, as it were, of itself, than through her agency. So mentally soliloquized Louise, with that strange infatuation which leads men ever to extenuate their guilt to themselves, even in the act of deliberately incurring it.

Again the girl shut her eyes, as if to hide from herself the hideousness of that which she was doing. Again she depressed the phial. When she next opened her eyes, more than three doses were in the glass.

Was this sufficient ? Louise knew not. It behoved her however, she thought, with a

kind of horrible prudence—it behoved her to err, if at all, on the safe side. The phial contained twelve doses; she would give six, and then almost refill it with water.

And now she proceeded carefully thus to pour in water until it should seem as though one dose alone had been abstracted. Her hand still trembled, but not so much as a few moments before. Since that first leap over the boundary-line of virtue into the domain of actual crime, she was growing rapidly firmer and firmer. She was now an acknowledged subject of the King of Evil. What wonder, then, that he should confirm and strengthen his subject?

When the phial was sufficiently refilled, she took care to place it conspicuously on the mantle-piece. This done, she poured some water into the glass containing the medicine, and approached her aunt's bedside. Strange to say, the latter still slept. Louise had never before known her sleep so long and soundly as in this last sleep, which was to her the portal, as it is to all the emblem, of death. Should she wake her? She must, or her own resolution might give way.

"Aunt!" she said, in a voice low and hoarse.

No answer, no sign of motion.

"Aunt!" she repeated yet louder, hoping against hope that her aunt might not reply, that she might after all be dead, without intervention on her part.

But this time the old woman opened her eyes and looked round with a wild, frightened expression.

"Is that you, Louise?" she asked faintly, whilst a shudder seemed to shoot through her frame.

"Yes, aunt, what is the matter?"

"How strange you look, girl. Your voice is so hoarse; and what makes you so pale, and your eyes so bright and piercing?"

Well might the old woman inquire. The face of Louise was as the marble of the tomb, whilst in her glance there glittered that cold, clear, calculating, inexorable cruelty of expression which lends so horrible a fascination to the eye of the serpent.

"I have been sitting up so much of late, aunt, that it is no wonder if I look strange." Thus much did Louise force herself to say

in explanation. Then she added : “ But what is the matter with you ? ”

“ I had a dream, girl—a fearful dream !—I dreamt I was lying on the brink of a precipice—a strange, awful place—dark, and, to seeming, bottomless. I knew not what it hid, only I felt it must needs hide somewhat of unknown horror, so I shrank back in dread. But I was weak, I could not move a step ; yet where I lay—fearfully near though I was—I seemed for the moment safe. Then came one—it seemed a woman, only the face was shrouded, awfully shrouded — and would force me over. I could do nothing, I was so weak. I felt her thrust me forward. As I was falling, I thought I heard her call me ‘ aunt,’ and in my terror I awoke, and saw you standing beside me.”

The old woman sank back exhausted when she had uttered these words. Meanwhile the face of Louise had gathered fresh paleness and sternness. It was then indeed true that coming events had cast their shadows before on the mind of her aunt. Could there be a presentiment without a fulfilment ? Louise trowed not. It was clear the hand of fate

was on them both—on the one to suffer, on the other to do.

“You must have mixed up my voice with your dream, aunt,” she remarked, still in the same weird, hollow tone. “I called you ‘aunt’ several times.”

“Perhaps so! Perhaps so!” answered the old woman, “but it was very awful. Thank God it was only a dream.”

“Yes, only a dream,” repeated Louise, with a calmness and a deliberation positively appalling to herself. What was in her, that she could thus relentlessly cajole her victim?

“Why have you lit the candle?” asked the old woman, after a pause, reverting, as usual, to the one master passion of her life. “It is very wasteful. What do you want with a light now?”

“I want it to give you your medicine.”

“Ah! the new medicine the doctor spoke of. Well, I hope it will do me good—more good than the last, which was simply useless—so much money thrown away. Where is it?”

“It is ready for you on the table. But, aunt, shall I not read to you a little first?”

"Read what? I'm not fond of reading; and what an odd time to choose!" said the patient, querulously.

"I thought you might like me to read some prayers to you before you went to—sleep."

"Why to-night in particular? You've never offered before. No! I'm too tired."

Louise was relieved at this answer. She was ready to have gone through the grim deceit had her aunt so desired, but she was not sorry to be spared the effort. With wonderful self-command she went to the table and fetched the glass containing the overdose. With lips compressed, she again neared the bed, and holding the glass in a hand which was now firm as rock, she presented it to her aunt. The latter put it to her lips, whilst Louise raised her in the bed.

"It is very bitter," she said, removing it again, after having tasted only a few drops.

"It will do you good," answered Louise, with horrible calmness.

"I've a great mind not to take it!" continued the old woman, eyeing the glass reluctantly. Could it be that this was a last

attempt of some invisible friend to save her?

“The taste will only last for a moment, aunt, and then you will feel such a change,” said Louise, with a satanic ambiguity. She had now reached that point in guilt when she was, as it were, beginning to enter into the horrible spirit of the scene.

Frau Schönbrunn raised the glass again, glanced once more reluctantly at its contents, and, making an effort, drank off the draught slowly to the last drop. Then she sank back wearily upon the bed.

The church-clock struck another quarter, and at the same time Louise heard an awful voice whisper into her ear with ghastly distinctness the word—**MURDERESS!**

She started and turned round. There was no one near her. Affrighted, appalled, overwhelmed by the magnitude of her guilt—a magnitude which, till then, with all her deliberation, she had not realized—she set down the glass, and prepared to leave the room. She could not remain another instant; she knew not what would happen next; she could not bear to watch the death agonies.

"Aunt," she said, "I will now call Justin; she is going to sit up with you for the rest of the night."

The old woman had closed her eyes, for she was weary, but she was not too weary to forget her habitual querulousness.

"You do not treat me kindly," she answered. The words smote with a fearful appropriateness on her niece's heart.

Then, a second later, she added :

"Put out the light."

"I have put it out," answered Louise, with an awful depth of unconscious allegory. So saying she fled, white, ghastly, guilty, from the room. And again and again in the dark *Inferno* of her heart kept ringing the one word, "Murderess !"

END OF VOL. II.





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